

# Wittgenstein

Edited by Denis McManus

## Wittgenstein & Scepticism

# Scepticism

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## WITTGENSTEIN AND SCEPTICISM

Wittgenstein is arguably the greatest philosopher of the last hundred years. Scepticism is one of the central problems that modern philosophy faces. This collection is the first to be devoted to an examination of how that great philosopher's work bears on this fundamental philosophical problem.

Wittgenstein's reaction to scepticism is complex, articulating both a sense that sceptical problems are ultimately unreal and a sense that scepticism teaches us something about the fundamental character of the human predicament.

The essays, specially written for this collection by distinguished philosophers and commentators on Wittgenstein, explore that reaction, addressing, in particular, scepticism about the existence of the external world and of other minds. In doing so, the book explores issues not only in theory of knowledge but also in metaphysics, the philosophy of mind, language, perception and literature, as well as raising questions about the nature of philosophy itself.

Several of the chapters address the work of Stanley Cavell, perhaps the most influential commentator on the work of Wittgenstein, and Cavell replies in the final piece to four of those chapters.

This collection is essential reading for students and scholars of Wittgenstein and anyone interested in the debate surrounding scepticism.

**Contributors:** Akeel Bilgrami, Stanley Cavell, James Conant, Ilham Dilman, Jane Heal, Andrea Kern, Marie McGinn, Denis McManus, Edward Minar, Anthony Palmer, Michael Williams, Crispin Wright.

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# WITTGENSTEIN AND SCEPTICISM

*Edited by Denis McManus*

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# CONTENTS

<i>Contributors</i>	<i>xi</i>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
DENIS McMANUS	
<i>Notes</i> 20	
<b>1 Wittgensteinian certainties</b>	<b>22</b>
CRISPIN WRIGHT	
1 <i>Moore's 'Proof' and scepticism</i> 22	
2 <i>Norms of enquiry</i> 31	
3 <i>Other 'hinges'</i> 38	
4 <i>Scepticism unhinged?</i> 41	
5 <i>Towards an entitlement</i> 47	
<i>Notes</i> 54	
<b>2 Scepticism and pragmatism</b>	<b>56</b>
AKEEL BILGRAMI	
<i>Notes</i> 74	
<b>3 Wittgenstein's refutation of idealism</b>	<b>76</b>
MICHAEL WILLIAMS	
1 <i>Wittgenstein's argument: the problem phase</i> 78	
2 <i>The diagnostic phase</i> 84	
3 <i>The therapeutic phase</i> 88	
4 <i>The diagnosis completed</i> 92	
<i>Notes</i> 96	

<b>4 Varieties of scepticism</b>	<b>97</b>
JAMES CONANT	
1 <i>Cartesian and Kantian varieties of scepticism – a first pass at the distinction</i>	97
2 <i>On the labels ‘Cartesian’, ‘Kantian’ and ‘scepticism’</i>	102
3 <i>Some features of the Cartesian and Kantian genres of scepticism</i>	105
4 <i>The inflection of philosophical vocabulary in Cartesian and Kantian registers</i>	115
5 <i>A case of apparent agreement: Putnam and McDowell</i>	117
6 <i>An apparent disagreement: Cavell and Kripke</i>	122
7 <i>A second apparent disagreement: Cavell and McDowell</i>	124
8 <i>Conclusion</i>	130
Notes	131
<b>5 Solipsism and scepticism in the <i>Tractatus</i></b>	<b>137</b>
DENIS McMANUS	
1 <i>Some textual clues</i>	137
2 <i>Knowledge, intelligibility and con-formity</i>	139
3 <i>Wittgenstein on signs, symbols and intelligibility as con-formity</i>	141
4 <i>Doesn’t the subject bind language to the world?</i>	143
5 <i>Learning symbols</i>	144
6 <i>Is solipsism a solution to the puzzle?</i>	147
7 <i>Internal relations and the ladder to be thrown away</i>	148
8 <i>Illusions of possible explanation and an internal relatedness of names and objects</i>	149
9 <i>Solipsism, internal relations and the sign/symbol hybrid</i>	151
10 <i>A therapeutic response to scepticism</i>	154
11 <i>Concluding remarks</i>	155
Notes	156
<b>6 Wittgenstein and the question of linguistic idealism</b>	<b>162</b>
ILHAM DILMAN	
1 <i>What is linguistic idealism?</i>	162
2 <i>Realism and nominalism as forms of linguistic realism and idealism</i>	164
3 <i>Wittgenstein and Kant on the limits of empiricism</i>	169
4 <i>Language and the human world</i>	173
5 <i>Summing up</i>	175
Notes	177

## CONTENTS

<b>7 What are psychological concepts for?</b>	<b>178</b>
JANE HEAL	
1 <i>Introduction</i>	178
2 <i>Rationality, prediction and eliminativism</i>	179
3 <i>An avenue of escape?</i>	182
4 <i>Another argument for eliminativism</i>	184
5 <i>A two-element conception of rationality</i>	187
6 <i>Prediction, discussion and excuse</i>	190
7 <i>Eliminativism again</i>	194
Notes	198
<b>8 Understanding scepticism: Wittgenstein's paradoxical reinterpretation of sceptical doubt</b>	<b>200</b>
ANDREA KERN	
1 <i>Philosophy as theory</i>	201
2 <i>Therapy as the dissolution of sceptical doubt</i>	203
3 <i>Therapy as a paradoxical reinterpretation of sceptical doubt</i>	206
4 <i>The reason for scepticism</i>	211
5 <i>Philosophy and scepticism</i>	213
Notes	216
<b>9 Living with the problem of the other: Wittgenstein, Cavell and other minds scepticism</b>	<b>218</b>
EDWARD MINAR	
1 <i>Cavellian themes</i>	218
2 <i>The contours of other minds scepticism</i>	221
3 <i>The failure of scepticism: the 'gap argument'</i>	223
4 <i>The failure of other minds scepticism: the failure to find a best case</i>	227
5 <i>The truth in scepticism again: attitudes and acknowledgement</i>	231
6 <i>Living our scepticism: the question of motivation</i>	234
7 <i>Scepticism and tragedy</i>	236
Notes	237
<b>10 The everyday alternative to scepticism: Cavell and Wittgenstein on other minds</b>	<b>240</b>
MARIE MCGINN	
Notes	259

CONTENTS

<b>11 Scepticism and tragedy: crossing Shakespeare with Descartes</b>	<b>260</b>
ANTHONY PALMER	
1 <i>Introduction</i>	260
2 <i>Locke's Essay and readings of Shakespeare</i>	262
3 <i>Montaigne's Pyrrhonian scepticism</i>	266
4 <i>Wittgenstein and scepticism</i>	272
<i>Notes</i>	276
<b>12 Reply to four chapters</b>	<b>278</b>
STANLEY CAVELL	
<i>Notes</i>	291
<i>Bibliography</i>	292
<i>Index</i>	300

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# INTRODUCTION

*Denis McManus*

The spell that Wittgenstein has cast over philosophy in the relatively short time since his death stems, at least partly, from the promise his work holds out to us of a response to scepticism, the great bug-bear of modern philosophy. Scepticism is the anxiety that we do not know what we think we know and that, for all we know, the world may be very different from how we take it to be. For instance, there may be no external world beyond the impressions that I take to be delivered by my bodily senses; there may be no other minds animating the other seemingly human bodies that I see in motion around me; and there may never have been that course of events that I think of as ‘the past’ – instead I may have emerged into existence only a moment ago replete with a stock of erroneous ‘memories’ misleadingly presenting a ‘past’ that never happened. On what basis, the sceptic asks, do we instead believe that there is an external world, populated by other minds, and possessed of an extended past? His answer is that there is none, that the evidence that we have for believing in these fundamental and seemingly obvious truths is quite consistent with bizarre, nightmarish alternatives.

It is to Wittgenstein that many contemporary philosophers have turned in search of a response to the threat of scepticism. They have turned, in the main, to his discussions in the 1930s and 1940s of meaning, understanding and rule-following (in PG, BB, PI and RFM),<sup>1</sup> his reflections on the possibility of a ‘private language’ (in PI, NFL, LSD and NPL), his later writings on philosophy of psychology (RPP 1, RPP 2, LW 1 and LW 2) and the set of notes written shortly before his death and published as *On Certainty*. Philosophers have seen in this work a rich variety of responses to scepticism. Some commentators have seen certain kinds of sympathy for scepticism in Wittgenstein’s writings. Kripke sees there a new form of scepticism, a meaning scepticism according to which the very meaning of our words ‘vanishes into thin air’ (Kripke 1982: 22). Fogelin (1987 and 1994) and Palmer (this volume) have seen Wittgenstein as an inheritor of the perspective of Pyrrhonian scepticism, in expressing a scepticism about philosophy itself. And Cavell (1979) has seen Wittgenstein as helping to expose a ‘truth in scepticism’ and the possibility that, in the case of other minds, we may ‘live our scepticism’.

Nonetheless, Wittgenstein's work has typically been mined for a refutation or, more often, a dissolution of scepticism. A refutation would show that the sceptic's views are false, that actually we can know that there is an external world or can know the minds of others. Such an aim sits uncomfortably with the recurrent theme in Wittgenstein's writings that philosophical problems are, in some sense, unreal; philosophical problems cannot be solved not, as one might put it, because they are insoluble but because there is no 'they' there to be solved.

In the first section of this introduction, I sketch two strategies that philosophers have adopted in attempting to undermine the apparent innocence of the sceptic's starting point, and indicate how some of Wittgenstein's work might be read in that light. I then go on to give that reading a twist by setting out one of the more important and most distinctive motifs that characterise Wittgenstein's response to philosophical issues, the notion that he works by 'assembling reminders' (PI 127) of the ways, and contexts, in which we ordinarily use our words. This discussion provides, I hope, a useful context within which to approach the chapters that make up this volume, an overview of which the remaining three sections provide.

## I

The arguments that sceptical philosophers offer are deeply unsettling because they derive shocking, deeply counter-intuitive conclusions from what seem to be nothing more than mundane facts about our ordinary lives: we make perceptual errors and we recall our dreams as seeming as real as waking life; we are taken in by the behaviour of fraudsters and sometimes choose to 'keep our thoughts to ourselves'; our memories are indeed unreliable and we rely much of the time on historical evidence that we know could be interpreted in more than one way. From such seemingly undeniable premises, the sceptic argues to his apocalyptic conclusions by seemingly uncontentious steps.

Hence, responses to scepticism often seek to show that the sceptic is not the innocent that he seems to be. In its most ambitious form (illustrating what one might call a 'transcendentalist' strategy), such a response would show that the sceptic is unwittingly committed to precisely those views on which he aims to cast doubt. For example, Kant argues that, because I am conscious of my own existence as 'determined in time' – as ordered temporally – my inner experience (to which the external world sceptic claims our knowledge is confined) can only be as it is by virtue of my also possessing 'immediate consciousness of the existence of other things outside me', providing 'something *permanent* in perception' by reference to which 'my existence in time can itself be determined' (Kant 1961 (1781/1787) B 276). Or so the argument goes. Less ambitiously, one might deny the sceptic's innocence by arguing that 'before he comes on stage', as Thompson Clarke puts it, he

## INTRODUCTION

has equipped himself with ‘the product of a large piece of philosophizing’ (Clarke 1972: 754). An example of this strategy (which one might call the ‘unacknowledged debts’ strategy) is the proposal of Dretske (1970) and Nozick (1981) that, if the sceptic’s reason for claiming that I do not know that the familiar world around me exists is that I do not know that I am not a brain in a vat (a circumstance which I also recognise is incompatible with the existence of the familiar world), he presupposes a questionable ‘closure principle’ of the form: ‘If S knows p, and S knows that p entails not-q, then S knows not-q’. If the sceptic’s argument rests not only on platitudes but also on a contentious philosophical claim, his conclusion would be no more compelling than that claim. Scepticism would no longer be an unanticipated shock written into the thinking of any and all of us, waiting to be uncovered; instead it would be an implication of a particular philosophical outlook – particular, peculiar and implausible precisely on the grounds, one might argue, that it has counter-intuitive implications such as scepticism.

There are aspects of Wittgenstein’s different responses to scepticism that tally with these recognisable strategies. Illustrating the first, ‘transcendentalist’ strategy, some interpretations of the ‘private language argument’ see in it the claim that my capacity to think or talk intelligibly presupposes the existence of a community of other thinkers and talkers with whom I share concepts. If the thought and talk of the sceptic is to be intelligible there must then be, *pace* the sceptic, a community of others and an external world for them to populate.<sup>2</sup> Illustrating the ‘unacknowledged debts’ strategy, Wittgenstein has been seen as revealing that a flawed, ‘internalist’ philosophy of mind is presupposed – rather than established – by the external world sceptic<sup>3</sup> and that a problematic metaphysical distinction between mental states and behaviour is presupposed – rather than established – by other minds scepticism.<sup>4</sup> If so, these striking conclusions will be no more compelling than the metaphysical views that they presuppose.

But some have seen in Wittgenstein a profound methodological shift, a break with the aims and modes of thought of traditional philosophers (what is ‘traditional’ about them and what that ‘break’ is being one and the same crucial question). One distinctive motif in his work is an insistence on our need to be reminded of the ways in which we ordinarily use words.<sup>5</sup> In his early work, he argues that ‘surface grammatical’ similarities between words may suggest that the use of different words is more similar than it really is.<sup>6</sup> This theme is given a twist in his later work with the proposal that the very same words used in one context might serve to say something different, or indeed nothing at all, when invoked in another. As a result, it may be through a distorting lens that we look upon what is happening when we talk of ‘knowing’ and ‘doubting’ in different contexts.

For example, according to Cavell’s reading of Wittgenstein, the sceptic ‘epistemologizes’ ‘the problem of the other’, superimposing a cognitive problem on the existential problems that characterise what it is actually

like to ‘get to know someone’, to feel that one ‘no longer knows someone’, to be ‘taken in by the way someone behaves’ or to ‘see someone’s feelings in their face’. In reflecting on the situations in which we talk of these forms of ‘knowledge’, ‘ignorance’, ‘deception’ and ‘perception’, what do we see? Perhaps we see, as Kern suggests, that the capacity to use a concept such as ‘pain’ is essentially a capacity to respond practically to the pain of another’ (p. 209). Perhaps we see, as Minar suggests, that in the contexts where we talk of ‘evidence’ for what another is thinking the existence of minds is actually ‘a foregone conclusion’ (p. 226). If either of these claims convinces, the perspective from which one might *merely believe* that the world features minds will have turned out to be a myth, that ‘belief’ a confusion.<sup>7</sup> A distorting vision of ourselves and our involvement with others – a distorting fantasy of, and for, knowledge – will have emerged as a precondition of our seeing the mind of another as just another object of knowledge<sup>8</sup> and the problem that others pose for us as one specifically of knowing them.

This volume aims to help us think again, through Wittgenstein, about scepticism. Some of the responses presented may fit well the traditional philosophical strategies of exposing ‘transcendental conditions’ of the sceptic’s doubts that confound his doubts or unacknowledged and contentious theoretical debts that burden him; their advocates may argue that it is only through such ‘straight solutions’ (to adapt an expression of Kripke’s), rather than through some hoped-for ‘dissolution’, that we have any real prospect of laying our sceptical anxieties to rest. But the kinds of ‘commitment’ alluded to in the preceding paragraph seem to point us to a layer in our thinking beneath that on which ‘straight solutions’ operate and theoretical debts accrue, to a layer in which our philosophical questions are constituted. So, for example, it seems odd to say that the other minds sceptic *assumes* that minds are ‘just another object of knowledge’. Rather, it constitutes his question; it makes him an *epistemologist* of other minds. Does this kind of diagnostic thinking that exposes such ‘commitments’ merit description as a ‘successor to philosophy’?<sup>9</sup> Only by examining in detail how Wittgenstein changes our understanding of philosophical problems can we establish a determinate sense for that question, let alone an answer. This volume contributes to that effort too.

## II

The first three chapters in the collection examine themes in *On Certainty*, the work in which Wittgenstein most directly confronts scepticism. These notes arose out of discussion with Norman Malcolm of G.E. Moore’s papers, ‘Proof of the External World’ and ‘A Defense of Common Sense’. A central motif in Wittgenstein’s response is that Moore is mistaken in wanting to claim that he does indeed know the propositions that the sceptic doubts; but while agreeing with the sceptic that, for example, we lack evidence in support

## INTRODUCTION

of these propositions, Wittgenstein insists, against the sceptic, that these propositions do not stand *in need of* evidence. The first three chapters explore some of the different reasons why this might be so.

Crispin Wright argues that *On Certainty* draws our attention to a range of propositions which are distinguished by ‘constituting or reflecting our implicit acceptance of various kinds of *rules of evidence*’ (p. 42). The recognition of propositions with this status holds out the promise of a response to sceptical doubts since arguably these propositions can be neither defended, *pace* Moore, nor criticised, *pace* the sceptic, ‘in terms of the idea of knowledge’. Wright finds much in this proposal but argues that there are reasons to believe that these ‘rules’ are subject to a kind of assessment after all. He argues that the rules of empirical enquiry cannot be simply ‘up to us’, as empirical enquiry has an overall point to which these rules must answer: arriving at truths and avoiding falsehoods of the independent empirical world. This thought may run counter to the general tenor of the later Wittgenstein’s philosophy: there one finds at work an ‘internalism’, according to which practices of enquiry are not subject to evaluation by such external objectives, a view comparable to Putnam’s internal realism and to that expressed in Wright’s own ‘Facts and Certainty’ (1985). But Wright now sees such responses as unappealing, not only because they turn on ‘deep and unresolved issues in the theory of meaning’ (p. 47) but also because they counter-intuitively insist that the ‘hinges’ in question are ‘incapable of intelligible mismatch with the world’ (p. 47), an insistence which, Wright argues, would counter-intuitively make the sceptic’s questioning no more unsettling than scepticism about humour or taste.

There is, however, another line of thought to be unearthed in *On Certainty* that Wright sees as viable. It turns on the observation that any particular cognitive achievement will rest on presuppositions which cannot be confirmed without undertaking another cognitive investigation that would have comparable presuppositions of its own. Since any imagined, final confirmation of this pyramid of presuppositions is a myth, Wright argues that its enactment cannot be necessary to the undertaking of an ‘epistemically responsible’ investigation. Instead the key principle is that one ought to trust one’s conclusions only as much as one trusts any presupposition about which one has some *specific reason* to worry (p. 50). Consequently, if a particular investigation is important to us and investigations of its presuppositions would, in turn, rest upon presuppositions of their own, of no more secure antecedent status and which one might investigate, then we are entitled to accept our initial investigation’s presuppositions without having specific evidence in their favour (p. 51).

Extending this view to encompass the classic ‘presuppositions’ upon which scepticism focuses is a complicated matter. In attempting to confirm ‘presuppositions’ such as ‘There is a material world’ and ‘There are other minds’, our problem is not one of beginning an infinite regress of confirmation; rather we have no idea how we might go about confirming these presupposi-

tions. But to claim that we might forgo the kinds of cognitive risk involved in the kinds of judgement for which they and similar propositions constitute presuppositions would be to claim, Wright argues, that we need never find ourselves in a situation in which we justify our claims about a domain on the basis of assembled information about another domain, taking the latter as 'indicators' of the former. To make that claim would be to claim that none of our thoughts represent states of affairs that are 'beyond our direct cognition' (p. 52). Though one might question whether our thoughts about the external world and even about other minds have the kind of inferential architecture in question,<sup>10</sup> Wright proposes that it would be absurd to suggest that our thoughts about natural law and the past lack that architecture too. He argues that thought purified of this form of judgement, and thus of commitment to the presuppositions that underpin the inferences that it necessarily involves, would then no longer be the thought of a rational agent. Hence, because 'rational agency is not an optional aspect of our lives' (p. 53), we are entitled to these presuppositions.

Moore's position in the papers to which *On Certainty* responds is deeply puzzling. In offering a supposed refutation of scepticism which transparently seems to beg the question against the sceptic, Moore seems to be reasoning 'almost as though', as Clarke puts it, 'he had had a philosophical lobotomy' (Clarke 1972: 757). But these papers have held a certain fascination for philosophers, for Wittgenstein in particular, and Akeel Bilgrami argues that they are right to do so. He argues that one can discern in Moore a potentially powerful pragmatist response to scepticism. He begins by exploring James Pryor's argument that at the heart of Moore's response is the notion that, in some cases, our experiences as of p yield an 'immediate *prima facie* justification' for believing that p. One possesses such a justification without needing to justify antecedently one's belief in the falsity of other propositions whose truth would be incompatible with the truth of p – this is what makes the justification 'immediate' – as long as one has no 'positive evidence' for thinking that one of these incompatible propositions is indeed true – this is what makes the justification '*prima facie*'. To insist that my having the experience of there being a hand before me provides such an immediate *prima facie* justification for believing that there is indeed a hand before me is to deny the sceptic's assumption that the latter belief can be justified only if – even in the absence of any evidence suggestive of the following strange possibilities – I can antecedently justify my belief that I am not being deceived by an Evil Demon, am not a brain in a vat, etc.

Bilgrami argues that there is a more general moral embodied in this potentially profitable response to scepticism. Pryor claims that there is a 'positive presumption' that *experiences* as of p provide a *justification* for beliefs that p; Bilgrami argues that this represents a particular application of the more general principle that there is a positive presumption that our perceptual beliefs are *true* unless there is '(positive) counter-empirical evidence against

## INTRODUCTION

them' (p. 62). This principle is tied neither to the notion of justification nor to that of a certain kind of transition from experience to perceptual belief. But Bilgrami argues that we can generalise yet further, that what is doing the work in Pryor's Moorean response to scepticism is a quite general principle about doubt that can be applied not merely to perceptual beliefs but to 'all the beliefs in our enquiry of which we are *certain*' (p. 64) and that that principle is itself fallout from the yet more general tenet of pragmatism, 'Nothing makes a difference to epistemology, which does not make a difference to enquiry' (p. 65).

Bilgrami compares and contrasts this pragmatist outlook with *On Certainty*'s and in particular with the reading of that work offered in Wright's 'Facts and Certainty'. Both outlooks endorse the notion of certainties which do not stand in need of justification while scientific investigation is on-going. But Bilgrami argues that his pragmatist 'hinge propositions', first, are not confined to 'institutional' certainties such as 'There is a material world' (upon which Wright focuses in that piece) – instead the pragmatist would include beliefs such as that I have a hand and that the earth is not flat – and, second, are not beyond the possibility of doubt on the basis of counter-evidence.

Wright's more recent view (as expressed in this volume) is perhaps closer to that which Bilgrami offers. Wright has himself come to wonder about the range of certainties to which Wittgenstein wishes to draw our attention and has come to share Bilgrami's belief that the 'hinges' of 'Fact and Certainty' are merely more general than propositions that are obviously vulnerable to counter-evidence. Both Bilgrami and Wright now emphasise that *On Certainty* poses a challenge to our notion of what an epistemically responsible investigation is and question, in particular, the sceptic's assumption that such an investigation requires us to have established warrant for all of its presumptions, not merely those about which one might worry in the light of specific items of possible counter-evidence. How deeply similar these two outlooks ultimately are – one inspired principally by Moore, the other by Wittgenstein – is an issue I will leave to the reader.

Michael Williams' piece questions the notion that *On Certainty* presents a uniform form of opposition to sceptical doubt about a broad variety of bedrock certainties. According to what he calls the 'Framework Reading' (which he sees in the work of McGinn and Stroll and in Wright's 'Facts and Certainty'), the significance of the certainties that Wittgenstein examines lies in the fact that a proper appreciation of their special status would provide a response to what he calls 'Agrippan scepticism', the view that knowledge can only be founded on prior knowledge and that that requirement leaves us with a regress of justification that cannot be halted. According to the Framework Reading, this kind of sceptical anxiety founders in the face not of propositions that are known to be true but judgements it makes no sense to doubt.

Williams argues that this reading fails to recognise a distinct argument, to be found in the first part of *On Certainty*, which specifically targets external

world scepticism. The considerations upon which the Framework Reading focuses capture only the first phase of this argument, a phase in which Wittgenstein's remarks serve not to answer the sceptic but only to make us aware of the peculiar character of the sceptic's doubt. This 'problem phase' then invites us to enter a 'diagnostic phase' in which, Williams argues, Wittgenstein identifies what is problematic with the 'claim', 'There are physical objects': 'Physical object' is a piece of 'logical or semantic vocabulary' (p. 86) unsuitable for formulating what the sceptic believes he has formulated, namely, an empirical or factual statement comparable to 'There are unicorns'.<sup>11</sup> "Objects" are what singular terms pick out and, within the practices of identification and re-identification that singular reference involves, we divide 'objects' up into broad logical categories, of which 'physical object' is one and 'colour' and 'quantity' are others. Hence the oddity of 'There are physical objects': 'At most it could mean: "We talk about tables, chairs, dogs, cats, etc." (p. 86) and that is not what the sceptic intended to doubt.

But the argument is still not complete: in its 'therapeutic phase', the argument seeks to identify why the nonsensicality of 'There are physical objects' is not apparent to the sceptic, why they take it to express a hypothesis comparable to 'At this distance from the sun there is a planet'. Williams argues that the root of their confusion is their conviction that 'experiential knowledge' (knowledge of 'sense-data') is epistemologically prior to knowledge of physical objects, the latter (if we possess it!) inferentially based on the former. But the immunity to error characteristic of 'experiential knowledge', and which motivates the sceptic to believe in the epistemic priority of experience, is 'a feature of language-use as such' (p. 90), 'a pervasive feature of discursive practice' (p. 91). The circumstances in which errors are inconceivable are a much broader set of circumstances than the sceptic supposes, the sceptic who thinks it a feature which distinguishes my experience as of a hand before me from my belief that there is a hand before me. This realisation, Williams argues, challenges the sceptic's conviction that 'Here is a hand' must be understood as a hypothesis (as based on experiential knowledge in contrast with which that hypothesis is less certain).

But why does the sceptic make the initial mistaken supposition? Williams extracts one more insight from Wittgenstein, the insight that knowledge is not a mental state. The fact that our first-person avowals cannot be seen as mistaken (other than in exceptional circumstances) and that 'know' is 'factive' ('I know that p' entails 'p') would seem to allow inner or subjective states of mine (that one might take 'I know that p' to express) to ensure that certain objective facts obtain. Since this seems absurd, we mistakenly conclude, Williams suggests, that the only facts that are 'immediately' known are facts about one's own mental states. This idea of knowledge as a peculiar fact-guaranteeing mental state illustrates what Williams calls 'epistemological realism', the notion that constraints on justification are derived from 'the

## INTRODUCTION

natural order of reason'. The sceptic sees the epistemic priority of experience as a consequence of the character of the mind: experiential knowledge is 'all we have to work with'. To reject such an epistemological realism is to embrace what Williams calls a 'pragmatic' view of norms, according to which notions of doubt and justification are implicit within our practices of enquiry. Williams sees this view as implicit within the notion of meaning as use and thus the rejection of knowledge as a mental state can be seen as a natural partner for this well-known Wittgensteinian proposal.

## III

Scepticism's position within philosophy is a complex matter. It is arguably the most significant motif in post-Cartesian philosophy and shapes not only its epistemology but also its metaphysics, its philosophy of mind and its philosophy of language.<sup>12</sup> Yet scepticism seems to have had a negligible impact in the Middle Ages<sup>13</sup> and scepticism about neither the external world<sup>14</sup> nor other minds<sup>15</sup> seems to have had an intuitive appeal in the ancient world. So philosophers once busied themselves quite happily without such sceptics as their professional tormentors. What questions then were, and perhaps have remained, occluded by the Cartesian epistemologising coup and what might an exploration of those questions teach us about scepticism? Guided by Wittgenstein, the next three chapters in this volume provide, in different ways, an examination of the broader philosophical context within which scepticism's peculiarly epistemological concerns emerge.

James Conant argues that some of our difficulties in understanding scepticism arise out of a failure to distinguish two apparently distinct varieties of scepticism, which he labels 'Cartesian' and 'Kantian'. Broadly speaking, the former is a worry over how we can claim to know certain kinds of matter to be true, whereas the latter is a worry over what it is to be able to make certain kinds of claim – true *or* false; the Cartesian sceptic worries over whether things actually are the way they seem, whereas the Kantian wonders how it is possible for things to so much as seem to be any particular way at all. These two problematics can be seen at work in different areas of philosophy: in philosophy of perception, for example, the Cartesian sceptic asks how we can know that external objects are as our senses present them as being, whereas a Kantian sceptic might ask how the senses can present impressions of external things being any particular way; in the problem of other minds, the Cartesian sceptic asks how I can know whether another person is thinking or feeling in the way in which his behaviour suggests, whereas a Kantian sceptic might ask how behaviour can so much as suggest how a person thinks or feels. Conant identifies several distinguishing features that characterise the two kinds of problematic. For example, whereas Cartesian scepticism may lead to a disappointment – that we cannot claim to know matters we believed we did – Kantian scepticism leads to a kind of despair: we are unable to make

sense of what it is to be experiencing – or thinking or meaning – things in ways that we also cannot help but believe we do and do so in the very act of asking our sceptical question. As Conant puts it, whereas Cartesian scepticism leaves us with doubt, faced with Kantian scepticism, the mind *boggles*.

Some may baulk at the use of ‘scepticism’ in describing the second kind of problematic and Conant gives his reasons for favouring a use of that term beyond the purely epistemological concerns of the first kind. However, this terminological issue is independent of Conant’s proposal that these two kinds of problematic have been articulated in very similar terms and, as a result, are not always clearly distinguished. Conant suggests that they and, crucially, the way in which they relate to one another provide central themes in Wittgenstein’s work and, as a result, in that of his most important commentators too; in the final sections of his chapter, Conant argues that failures to recognise where their concerns are Cartesian or Kantian in character underpin disagreements between Putnam, McDowell, Kripke and Cavell.

Though less frequently discussed than Wittgenstein’s later reflections on scepticism, the *Tractatus* offers a bold but gnomic assessment of scepticism as ‘*not* irrefutable, but palpably senseless’ (TLP 6.51). In my own chapter, I argue that that charge is best understood as based on the belief that underlying the sceptic’s worries about our knowledge of the world are deeper questions, unrecognised by the sceptic, about the very intelligibility of that world, ‘Kantian’ questions – to use Conant’s term – about how thought and world must be constituted for the former to represent the latter. The notion that thought must possess a certain ‘form’ if it is to be capable of representing the world is a familiar notion in discussions of the *Tractatus*; a natural reading of that work takes it to give this ‘con-formity’ (as I label it) of thought and world a ‘realist’ construal, according to which the form of the world provides a standard to which thought must be answerable. I argue, however, that the *Tractatus* actually questions such a notion of conformity and that that criticism finds expression in its otherwise puzzling sympathy for solipsism. I develop two different readings of that sympathy, each underpinning a different interpretation of Wittgenstein’s assessment of scepticism.

The first reading ascribes to Wittgenstein a solipsistic metaphysics as an alternative explanation of the con-formity of thought and world. What this means for scepticism is that, if ‘I am my world’ (TLP 5.63), when, in sceptical mood, I contemplate the possibility that the world might not exist, I am contemplating a situation in which I and my contemplation would not exist either: since Subject and world are ‘internally related’, the former cannot exist without the latter. The second reading gives a quite different construal to Wittgenstein’s solipsistic formulations, arguing that the *Tractatus* ultimately casts doubt on whether a clear sense can be ascribed to the questions of intelligibility that the notion of con-formity articulates. According to this ‘therapeutic’ reading, thought and world are ‘internally-related’ in that we have no coherent notion of the former using which the questions of intel-

ligibility as con-formity (which a realism or a solipsism would answer) can be posed. On this basis, I identify a sense in which Wittgenstein's solipsistic formulations can be compared, as TLP 6.54 famously requires, to rungs of a ladder that is to be climbed and then discarded. As for the sceptic, from this perspective, he is doubly confused: first, he fails to see how, if one embraces the conception of the Subject to which he is committed, the questions of intelligibility as con-formity loom; second, those questions, which would make sense if his conception of the Subject made sense, are, in fact, confused. The chapter ends by offering a brief indication of how this understanding of the perspective of the early Wittgenstein might help us approach his later reflections on scepticism.

That Wittgenstein might free us from scepticism but only by landing us in an even less attractive idealism is not an uncommon accusation. One form that accusation takes (which the chapters in this collection by Kern, Minar and McGinn challenge) is the proposal that Wittgenstein saves us from other minds scepticism only by foisting upon us a species of behaviourism, dispelling the puzzle over how we can know the reality of another's thoughts – when all we have available are the 'appearances' constituted by their behaviour – by insisting that there is nothing to that elusive 'reality'.

Ilham Dilman's piece criticises the claim that the later Wittgenstein is a 'linguistic idealist'. Dilman argues that linguistic realism – the doctrine that we apply words to items on the basis of perceived similarities between those items – involves a vicious circle: the realist overlooks the fact that such 'repetition of the same' is manifest only to those who have already mastered a language. Linguistic idealism, a reaction to the meaning scepticism that this failure may prompt, rejects these confused views but in such a way as to make the use of words arbitrary. What these opposed views have in common is the question they attempt to answer: 'What is the ultimate justification of the application of a general term?' Dilman argues that this question is confused, driving us to look beyond particular justifications that we may offer in applying words on particular occasions, as one might confusedly strip away leaves in search of 'the real artichoke' (PI 164).

Nevertheless, Wittgenstein has helped reveal, Dilman suggests, how the world in which we live, the human world, with its different 'dimensions of reality', has developed hand-in-glove with our life and language. The first step of Dilman's argument is his proposal that philosophical empiricism constitutes a problematic species of linguistic realism, according to which experience determines the kind of language we speak. He challenges this prioritisation, arguing against a picture of the senses as 'windows to the outside world'. Instead, our use of our senses is inter-dependent with the activities of ours in which they play a part and which are inconceivable apart from the languages we use. Dilman goes on to claim that the different 'dimensions of reality' in which different living creatures (including those of peoples belonging to different societies) live are 'internal to' their life and behaviour

– in the case of human beings the kind of life they live with the language they speak. This Wittgensteinian view differs from the linguistic idealist's simple determination of reality by language in that, while our conception of reality is internal to our language, that language itself is rooted in a life which the speakers share.

## IV

The next five chapters focus principally on scepticism about other minds. Heal takes a broadly Wittgensteinian approach to what Conant would call a form of Kantian scepticism regarding the intentional. This scepticism takes as its starting point a strong constitutive link between intentionality and rationality: 'any being to whom intentional states can be truly attributed must be rational' (p. 179). This link finds a place in Dennett's notion of 'the intentional stance', according to which our application of psychological concepts to an item, taken along with information about its situation and, crucially, the assumption that the item is indeed a rational agent, serves to generate predictions about how that item will behave ('the intentional stance' represents then another way of bringing about the same kind of outcome as 'the physical stance', which generates predictions about how an item will 'behave' on the basis of knowledge of its material composition and structure). However, even on a relatively minimal construal of the demands that the 'rationality assumption' imposes, it seems obvious that the others we seek to predict in this way fall short of those demands. If so, the strong constitutive link implies that these others should be denied intentional states: we may talk of them *as if* they possessed these states but this can be no more than an instrumentally useful way of carrying on and not a real description of the facts.

In response, Heal proposes an alternative conception of rationality, one which rejects the assimilation of the purpose of our psychological thinking to that of our natural scientific thinking. She proposes that a person's possession of rationality is made up of (i) 'a grasp on the high level and general notion of there being better and worse in inferential transitions between thoughts' and (ii) a particular 'inferential outlook', his set of views 'about what transitions in thought are approvable and disapprovable' (p. 187). The precise content of (ii) varies from one person to the next and across time and manifests itself in, among other things, the particular inferences the person draws; (i), on the other hand, is common to all rational agents and is shown in their engagement in the practice of asking about and assessing inferences. Heal offers an analogy with sight: just as ascribing sight to someone is ascribing a capacity the exercise of which yields information about the objects around us, rather than ascribing the possession of answers to all questions on that subject matter, ascribing rationality to someone is ascribing a capacity the exercise of which yields information about the realm of norms rather than ascribing the possession of a total grasp of the facts about good and bad reasoning.

## INTRODUCTION

This alternative view suggests a new picture of how the possession of rationality figures in our prediction of the behaviour of others, where (ii) is crucial: if rationality represents ‘an onward moving capacity [rather than] a particular level of achievement’ (p. 195), our failure to conform to some definite package of norms no longer has eliminativist implications. Her view also provides reminders – (i) coming to the fore here – of modes of interaction with one another which cannot be assimilated to the pursuit of predictions. For example, my inviting you to participate in reflection on a question about reasoning seems most naturally construed as driven by the hope that we shall both come to a better grasp of the topic in question, rather than merely trying to find out how you are liable to make inferences or treating you as a potentially better ‘tracker’ of the realm of norms.

Heal’s proposal could be seen as illustrating what Cavell calls his ‘colourful’ proposal that analytic philosophy has not ‘discovered the other as a philosophical problem’ (p. 280). The species of scepticism that she examines takes as a starting point a conception of others as ‘devices which we try to operate’ and a conception of what it is to understand another person as the capacity to predict how he or she will behave. When we attempt to place within this Procrustean bed our need to take for granted the rationality of those others that we seek to understand, the upshot is that we find it impossible to understand how we might ever ascribe intentional states to those others. Heal argues that this predicament arises out of a misconstrual of what it is that we assume in taking the other to be rational, having overlooked the role that this assumption actually plays in our dealings with others, partly by forgetting somehow just what those dealings with others really are like. An adequate understanding of ‘the rationality assumption’ and the role it plays in our ‘knowledge of other minds’ can only come about once we have at our disposal a proper appreciation of the challenge that ‘understanding another person’ represents: such an understanding may require us to rediscover the difference between seeing others as ‘devices which we try to operate’ and as ‘fellow human beings with whom we talk, with whom we co-operate on shared projects, from whom we ask help when we are muddled and with whom we seek to forge a jointly created and growing understanding’ (p. 194).

A similar re-evaluation of the relations in which we stand to others emerges in Andrea Kern’s discussion of three different kinds of response that philosophers inspired by Wittgenstein have offered to the more traditional form of other minds scepticism. These responses differ in, among other things, their understanding of his suggestion that his philosophy provides not novel philosophical theory but kinds of therapy. Some commentators have taken this claim with a large pinch of salt and see Wittgenstein’s insights into what is problematic in scepticism as articulated precisely by philosophical theories, irrespective of Wittgenstein’s self-characterisation. For example, Albritton and Malcolm, and more recently, Baker and Wright have argued that Wittgenstein’s response to scepticism about other minds is a theory ac-

cording to which there exists a defeasible but a priori relation between kinds of behaviour and kinds of psychological state. This theory, it is suggested, provides an answer to the sceptic: we do indeed have the knowledge upon which he mistakenly casts doubt.

Kern argues that it is the purpose of a kind of ‘dissolving therapy’, inspired by Wittgenstein and developed by Diamond, McDowell, McGinn and others, to expose, first, the failings of this theory and, second and crucially, the underlying assumption that it shares with scepticism and which accounts for those failings. In the responses to other minds scepticism discussed, the shared underlying commitment of the sceptic and his theoretical critics is a two-step model of our relation to other subjects. According to this model, we envisage that relation as one in which access to a person’s ‘inner sphere’ is mediated by our first recognising how things stand in her ‘outer sphere’, her body and its comportment; access to the latter sphere is direct, whereas access to the former is indirect. For the dissolving therapists, this model embodies a false perspective on our knowledge, one which inevitably leads to scepticism and within which no successful theoretical response to scepticism can be constructed.

Kern argues that, for McDowell, the two-step model displaces the concept of a human being from its central place in our understanding of relations to others and replaces it with a less than philosophically innocent concept of a human body, a replacement which occludes our point of view as participants in human communities and which is inspired by sociohistorical forces such as contemporary scientism. McDowell seeks to free us from the influence of this model by spelling out another conception of our knowledge of others, one which is implicit in our own perspective as participants in human life. According to this alternative view, when we describe behaviour, we describe it as expressive of the psychology of the person and hence her inner life is no longer seen – as the sceptic and anti-sceptical theorists see it – as ‘standing behind’, and known by us only by inference from, her behaviour.

Kern argues, however, that the dissolving therapists, though insightful, fail to appreciate the full depth of their insight. As a result, their alternative conception of our relations with others actually serves only to reinstate sceptical disquiet. According to that conception, behavioural criteria of pain are satisfied only if the behaviour in question is indeed expressive of pain. A further commitment of this conception is then a disjunctive conception of the experiential basis of judgements about the inner lives of others: correct and incorrect judgements do not share the same evidential basis. But Kern argues, drawing on the work of Cavell, that the sceptic will now see his problem not as resolved but as redescribed and disguised as the problem of how we can be certain that a criterion is indeed satisfied, as opposed to merely appearing to be so.

But there is another form of therapy available, a ‘paradoxical reinterpreting therapy’, to be found, Kern argues, in the work of Cavell. This therapy

## INTRODUCTION

responds to the sceptic not by dissolving his doubt but by reinterpreting the content of his discovery: in the case of other minds scepticism, what the sceptic sees as a discovered limitation of our epistemic faculties is reinterpreted in such therapy as revealing that our relation to others is not fundamentally epistemic. Kern illustrates this point by arguing that part of the essential background to our judgements that a person is in pain are our responses to that other person as in pain, our feelings of pity and our offering of consolation, medication or assistance. Seen in this context, *merely* judging that someone is in pain appears not as the fundamental, characteristic response of the practice in which the concept, ‘pain’, figures but instead as the *withholding* of an array of responses to the other, an array of which one must be capable if one is to count as a master of that practice. In what Kern calls the ‘normal cases’ that are fundamental to that practice, our behavioural responses to the other do not rest on evidence which would provide an answer to the question, ‘Is the other actually in pain?’ The capacity to make claims to knowledge of others’ inner lives is ‘primarily exercised in the taking of a practical attitude towards them’ (p. 210). A mastery of such knowledge claims requires a mastery of that practical attitude and thus we arrive at the conclusion that the sceptic arrives at but misunderstands, namely, that the practice to which our claims to knowledge belong cannot be ‘founded upon an epistemic basis’ (p. 211). Rather ‘[k]nowing is responding’ (p. 210).

Kern proposes that the sceptic, the anti-sceptical theorist and (to a lesser extent) the dissolving therapist all engage in a denial of the practices in which our concepts have content, leading to an ‘epistemologising’ of our knowledge of others. This tendency to misconstrue our actual practices of thought and talk, which the dissolving therapists only partly appreciate and (to the extent that they do appreciate it) see as a contingent fact about how philosophy has developed, is bound up, Kern argues, with the nature of philosophy itself. The philosopher’s reflections, she argues, begin with a withdrawal from his practices, with a denial, or breaking off, of his familiarity with, and his practical responses to, the world and others; only in this way does the notion that we have particular practices of judgement with specific forms emerge, the very object of philosophical reflection. The aim of Wittgenstein’s reinterpreting therapy is, Kern concludes, not to dissolve the sceptic’s doubt but to reveal this denial upon which it and failed efforts at ‘refutation’ and ‘dissolution’ rest.

To date, Stanley Cavell is surely Wittgenstein’s most inspirational, most provocative and simply deepest reader. It is Cavell in particular who has emphasised and developed the Wittgensteinian theme that the sceptic’s doubt rests on a mythologising of our position in relation to others. Nonetheless, two of his most intriguing suggestions seem, at least on the surface, rather un-Wittgensteinian: first, that there remains a kind of ‘truth in scepticism’ and, second, that, in the other minds case, we may ‘live our scepticism’. Some sense of how these Cavellian claims might be understood emerges in Kern’s

discussion. But in the chapters by Edward Minar and Marie McGinn they are subject to explicit examination.

Minar begins by questioning sceptical efforts to present as an innocuous starting point for our reflections a picture of mind and behaviour as realms that are distinct logically, metaphysically and epistemologically. This picture needs motivation, he argues, because the basis we have for making particular claims about minds are grasped only within a context in which access to minds and behaviour is taken for granted: first, our description of behaviour sorts it by what it expresses; second, grasping the possibility of deception – understanding the possibility of *disconnection* of mind and behaviour – involves ‘substantial familiarity with other minds’ (p. 225): recognising a specific reason for doubt about someone’s state of mind, Minar argues, ‘will normally leave me face to face with another mind, although perhaps one odder and more unfamiliar than I had anticipated’ (pp. 228–9).

Is there then a perspective from which to ask for reasons for believing ‘that there is mindedness around’ (p. 230). The home of the idea of evidence for and justification of particular claims about other minds is a context in which the existence of mind is ‘a foregone conclusion’; the status of particular items of behaviour as evidence ‘is underwritten by our more general commitment’ (p. 226).<sup>16</sup> It is here that Minar locates Cavell’s proposal that there is ‘a truth in scepticism’, arguing that this commitment is not itself a candidate for justification, is not a theoretical stance on a hypothesis of some sort. Instead it expresses ‘a willingness to continue to talk (to make sense of others and ourselves) in the particular ways we have at hand, to be responsible to and for *this* manner of speaking’ (p. 227).

Minar reads Cavell’s notion of ‘acknowledgement’ and what Wittgenstein calls one’s ‘attitude to a soul’ as elaborations on the ‘truth in scepticism’. Following a path that partially parallels Kern’s, Minar emphasises the role of responsiveness to others in our grasp of psychological concepts. It is within these particular contexts of involvement that those concepts find application; outside of those contexts, in situations in which we are *not* talking of ‘a human being and what resembles (behaves like) a human being’ (PI 281), it is unclear, Minar argues, just what we would be asked to imagine if asked to ascribe mental states (to ascribe them to a stone, for example).

With a profound divide between mind and behaviour robbed of (at least) *prima facie* plausibility and a recognition of the place of responsiveness and involvement in the constitution of the background against which psychological concepts are applied, we are ready, Minar argues, to understand Cavell’s ‘intuition’ that ‘we live our scepticism’. Unlike external world scepticism, where ‘[l]ife and reflection are (shockingly) at odds’ (p. 234), other minds scepticism reflects the fact that ‘each moment with others contains the prospect of both doubt *and* (if I let myself be open to the other, and the other to me) its overcoming’ (p. 235). Crucial to this pervasive possibility is our *willingness* to be open to others, to know and to be known by others. The pos-

## INTRODUCTION

sibility that we may fail to take up this responsibility is what Minar sees as the possibility that we may ‘live our scepticism’. This existential problem is ‘the *real* problem of the other’ and the sceptic’s interpretation of it as ‘a mere theoretical puzzle about our cognitive powers’ (p. 220) expresses ‘an intelligible, even a prevailing, wish to rationalize the rigours of our relations with others’ (p. 235), ‘to read our failures of intimacy and understanding’ not as personal failures but as matters of impersonal, metaphysical necessity, and hence, ‘as out of our hands’ (p. 236).

Though she agrees with Minar on several of the points that she thinks must be taken on board if we are to understand the other minds sceptic, McGinn questions Cavell’s reading of Wittgenstein as expressing a kind of sympathy for the sceptic. She argues that, although Wittgenstein points out forms of uncertainty that characterise our judgements of the thoughts and feelings of others, the uncertainties in question are still profoundly different from that which the sceptic invokes and lack the metaphysical significance that Cavell, she suggests, sees in them. McGinn takes Wittgenstein to be trying precisely to distinguish sceptical doubt from, first, uncertainties that arise on particular occasions in our use of psychological concepts and, second, general uncertainties that characterise the grammar of those concepts.

To take the former, pretence, understood as revealing a dissociation of ‘inner’ and ‘outer’, is often invoked in defence of other minds scepticism. But Wittgenstein, McGinn argues, challenges that understanding, pointing to how our responses to pretence are still ‘kinds of behaviour towards human beings’ (RPP I 151); they are responses to the acts of minded beings, seeing the acts now as motivated in certain ways, perhaps intended to deceive or exploit to some end the gullibility of the other, as the acts of someone who ought not to be trusted. Our concepts of pretence and of the doubts to which it may give rise have the content that they have because of their place in these deeper, ramifying complexities of human motivation and interaction and to come to master those concepts is to be drawn into those complexities. The sceptic’s doubt, on the other hand, is ‘intellectual or theoretical’ (p. 250) in lacking the connections, ‘practical, emotional and conceptual’ (p. 251), that are characteristic of the mistrustful, hesitant, circumspect modes of involvement with others that constitute our ordinary doubts. As such, the meaning of the sceptic’s ‘doubt’ is unclear, at best, representing perhaps ‘a wholly distinct form (or concept) of doubt’ (p. 251). Thus, McGinn believes that, *pace* Cavell, we ought to view the ‘doubts’ of the other minds sceptic in the same way as Cavell views those of the external world sceptic, as words drained of the meaning that they superficially appear to possess.

Wittgenstein draws our attention to a second kind of uncertainty that characterises the grammar of our ordinary psychological concepts but again, argues McGinn, his aim is to distinguish such uncertainties from the sceptic’s doubt. Human life is of such an unpredictable and irregular nature, she argues, that the concepts that articulate that life must possess a corresponding

complexity and ‘elasticity’. As a result, we cannot state ‘clear, determinate criteria’ for the feeling of grief or joy, for instance. However, it does not follow that we are always uncertain in our application of these concepts, rather that these concepts must cope with a variation and indefiniteness quite unlike that which confronts the concepts we use to describe physical objects, for example. The fact that our judgements of the inner lives of others are subject to ‘variations in individual response’ (resulting from ‘differences in character or temperament, . . . in past experience, . . . [in] knowledge, and so on’ (p. 257)), a fact that Minar in particular sees as specially significant, is interpreted by McGinn as significant in contributing to this distinctive sort of general indefiniteness in our psychological language-games. But McGinn argues that to draw our attention to these peculiarities of our psychological language games is to draw attention neither to a basis for sceptical doubt nor to some underlying metaphysical fact ‘that he is he and I am I’ that might be thought to explain those peculiarities. Wittgenstein’s efforts to represent perspicuously those peculiarities contribute to his attempts to help us shake free of just such temptations.

Cavell’s reflections on how the question of ‘the problem of the other’ has been registered and obscured in Cartesian scepticism have developed through a reading not only of Wittgenstein but also of Shakespeare. The fabric of difficulties, fears and joys into which we are woven when we seek, fear or enjoy an understanding of, or by, others is condensed and deformed by the Cartesian sceptic into the issue of how one can obtain knowledge of a peculiar kind of object, a mind. Cavell sees Shakespeare’s tragedies as exploring that fabric and that deformation, an attitude or way of living through which I might treat others (and perhaps myself) as objects of knowledge rather than recipients of acknowledgement or victims of avoidance.<sup>17</sup>

Anthony Palmer’s piece questions Cavell’s understanding of his own reading of Shakespeare, by questioning whether it is specifically Cartesian scepticism that informs those plays. Cavell sees in those plays an exploration of that same ‘rejection of the ordinary’ that Cartesian scepticism expresses. But Palmer argues that the established readings of the tragedies that Cavell challenges are actually ultimately Cartesian in character: Palmer charts the absorption of Descartes’ conception of the mind into conceptions of English poetry by identifying the entry of that conception into the English philosophical tradition in the work of Locke and its subsequent infiltration of criticism as epitomised in the work of Dr Johnson; it is in this way, Palmer argues, that a characteristically Cartesian conception of error comes to play a critical role in the orthodox readings of Shakespeare that Cavell rightly contests.

Palmer suggests that the key concepts of Cavell’s readings – ‘acknowledgement’, ‘denial’, ‘refusal’, ‘avoidance’, etc. – illuminate Shakespeare’s tragedies and, in doing so, also articulate a ‘rejection of the ordinary’. But, Palmer argues, Cartesian scepticism is only one of the ways in which such a ‘rejection’ has expressed itself within philosophy. Another is precisely the

## INTRODUCTION

target of Pyrrhonian scepticism and it is this ancient brand of scepticism, he claims, that informs Shakespeare's tragedies and whose influence there the key concepts of Cavell's readings capture.

For those unfamiliar with Pyrrhonism, it may be worth indicating how it both instantiates and attacks something that one can call 'scepticism'. The Pyrrhonian school offered a variety of arguments designed to bring about 'suspension of belief'; but there is debate over quite which kinds of belief they were concerned with. One reading presents what has become known as 'rustic Pyrrhonism', a suspension of all beliefs, including the common beliefs of everyday life. Another reading ascribes to these ancient sceptics an 'urbane Pyrrhonism' which targets only 'dogmatic beliefs that transcend common belief' (Fogelin 1994: 9), typified by philosophical beliefs. Rustic Pyrrhonism is closer to the scepticisms that have emerged since Descartes in as much as it challenges our ordinary ways of thinking, in ways which one might suspect it is impossible genuinely to live out. Urbane Pyrrhonism, on the other, would oppose just such forms of scepticism, in inviting us to doubt whether such philosophical issues express objects fit for belief or disbelief. Such a scepticism *about philosophy* would have among its targets scepticism about the external world, about other minds, etc., along with the brands of realism and idealism adopted in response to those scepticisms. Unsurprisingly, it is urbane Pyrrhonism that commentators such as Fogelin and Palmer see at work in Wittgenstein.<sup>18</sup>

Palmer traces the emergence of that brand of scepticism in Aristotle's criticisms of Plato as 'going beyond our ordinary ways of thinking and speaking' (p. 268) in a way that leads not to extraordinary discoveries but to 'claims' without content, to *teretismata*, meaningless noises. It is a concern with this susceptibility of ours that was taken up by the Pyrrhonian sceptics, codified by Sextus Empiricus and then appropriated by Montaigne. It is the scepticism expressed in his work, Palmer suggests, to which Shakespeare responds in his plays. Palmer also argues that we can make sense of the fact that Cavell arrived at the central concepts that articulate his distinctive readings of Shakespeare's work partly through a reading of Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* by noting the presence in that work too of not only an opposition to Cartesian scepticism but also to that broader temptation to utter *teretismata* which so concerned the Pyrrhonian sceptics. Philosophy's constructions represent for Wittgenstein and the Pyrrhonians so many 'houses of air' (Wittgenstein's word is *Luftgebaeude*).

Thus, Palmer argues, Cavell is right to see concepts of 'acknowledgement' and its absence at work in the work of Shakespeare and Wittgenstein, and right to see them as articulating our temptation to 'go beyond those ordinary ways of speaking and behaving within which our words and thoughts make sense' (p. 276). But a correct understanding of Shakespeare and Wittgenstein will depend, Palmer concludes, on recognising that their work draws on a broader and more ancient scepticism than Cavell realises.

Cavell's own contribution to this volume is a set of responses to four of the chapters that address his work.<sup>19</sup> Although he addresses issues raised by Minar's and Kern's chapters, Cavell focuses largely on the chapters by McGinn and Palmer, these being the most critical of the four. Cavell questions Palmer's interpretation of the 'standard readings' of Shakespeare's tragedies, his claim that those plays are shaped by Pyrrhonian rather than Cartesian scepticism and his comparison of Wittgenstein's critical perspective on philosophy with one to be found in Aristotle and the ancient sceptics. Cavell touches here on differences between external world scepticism and other minds scepticism and between Pyrrhonian and Cartesian scepticism, as well as on Wittgenstein's attitude towards the 'privacy' of the mind. Cavell responds to McGinn by questioning her assessment of his attitude towards other minds scepticism. In doing so, as well as emphasising again differences between external world scepticism and other minds scepticism, Cavell re-examines Wittgenstein's notion of a criterion and its relation to questions of certainty, reflects on his own concepts of acknowledgement, avoidance and the 'nihilism in scepticism', and calls into question how and why the sceptic so much as takes his discovery to be a 'thesis'.



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### Notes

- 1 Wittgenstein's writings are referred to in this volume using abbreviations explained in the Bibliography.
- 2 See, for example, Wright 1980, Kripke 1982, Mounce 1986, Fogelin 1987, O'Hear 1991 and Robinson 1992. This kind of interpretation has been criticised in Baker and Hacker 1984 and 1986 and McDowell 1998a Ch. 11.
- 3 See, for example, McCulloch 1995, McDowell 1998a Ch. 14, McDowell 1998b Ch. 11 and McManus (this volume).
- 4 See Cook 1969, McDowell 1998b Ch. 17, Kern (this volume) and Minar (this volume).
- 5 See, for example, PI 119–32.
- 6 This proposal is expressed in PI through the famous analogies with tools in a tool-box and the handles in the cabin of a train (PI 11–12).
- 7 One way of understanding some of the themes of *On Certainty* is as suggesting that there is perhaps something confused about the idea of 'mere belief' invoked above, in general rather than merely in its application to other minds.
- 8 See Fodor 1994: 292: 'It's gotten hard to believe that there is a *special* problem

## INTRODUCTION

about the knowledge of other minds (as opposed to knowledge of anything else's).'<sup>9</sup>

9 See M 113–14 and BB 62.

10 See Kern (this volume) section 2 and Minar (this volume) section 3.

11 This point, similar to one that Dilman makes in section 3 of his chapter in this volume, runs counter to the view that Bilgrami and Wright invite us to take, i.e. that 'There are physical objects' is simply a *more general* empirical or factual claim, upon which, at least in certain circumstances, we can rely without needing to provide positive evidence in its support.

12 The struggle between 'inferentialist' and 'disjunctivist' conceptions of perception might provide an illustration and is touched on in this volume by Wright, Kern and Minar.

13 See Popkin 1979.

14 See Burnyeat 1982 and Palmer this volume.

15 See Avramides 2001 Ch. 1 and Cavell this volume.

16 Minar aligns this commitment with *On Certainty*'s 'hinges' and his proposal might be contrasted fruitfully with Wright's notion of 'institutional facts' (this volume, section 1).

17 One way of formulating the disagreement between McGinn, Minar and Cavell might be as over whether there really is an attitude or way of living that fits that description.

18 For the rustic/urbane distinction, see Barnes 1982. For a brief review of some of the relevant literature, see Fogelin 1994: 3–12.

19 See note 1 to Cavell's reply.

# WITTGENSTEINIAN CERTAINTIES

*Crispin Wright*

G.E. Moore's 'A Defense of Common Sense' was first published in 1925 and his 'Proof of an External World' fourteen years later.<sup>1</sup> Apparently Wittgenstein had a long-standing interest in these papers and during the last eighteen months of his life, stimulated<sup>2</sup> by discussions with Norman Malcolm while his house guest in Ithaca in 1949, he composed the four short sets of rough notes we now have as *On Certainty*. My question here is whether these notes gesture at a principled and stable response to the issue at which Moore's papers had been directed – the issue of scepticism, and particularly scepticism about our knowledge of the material world. My eventual and hesitant answer will be: yes – though the development here must be sketchy and incomplete. It will be focused upon one specific though very general form of sceptical argument – certainly as disturbing as any – which we may begin by eliciting, ironically enough, from consideration of something that was supposed to help: Moore's curious 'Proof' itself.

## 1 Moore's 'Proof' and scepticism

The greater part of Moore's 'Proof of an External World' is devoted to grinding rumination on what it means to describe objects as 'external', or 'outside our minds' or 'presented in space' or 'to be met with in space'. No particularly startling consequences are elicited to reward the reader's ordeal. And the actual 'Proof' – which everyone on first reading feels blatantly begs the question – is confined to the last few pages. Here is the essence of it:

Premise	Here is a hand
Conclusion	There is a material world (since any hand is a material object existing in space)

where the premise is asserted in a context where Moore, as he supposes, is holding his hands up in front of his face, in good light, in a state of visual and cognitive lucidity, etc.

Why is this so clearly unsatisfactory? It is not that Moore is working with some outré concept of proof: his concept of a proof is that of a valid argument from known or warranted premises.<sup>3</sup> That seems pretty standard.<sup>4</sup> And the argument given is (trivially) valid. Nor is it happy to say that the problem is that Moore doesn't first prove his premise. He can perfectly fairly point out that it cannot always be reasonable to demand proof of the premises of a proof – sometimes we must claim knowledge without proof, or proof cannot get started (Moore 1939: 169–70). Moreover the premise – so Moore can plausibly contend – is probably more certain, in the relevant context, than the least certain premise in any sceptical argument, even the best.<sup>5</sup> Still, the offered 'Proof' surely isn't a proper proof at all.

The general issue this raises is under what circumstances a valid argument is indeed at the service of *proof* – i.e. the generation of a rational acceptance of the truth of its conclusion – or the rational overcoming of doubt about it. I have addressed this question – the question, in what is becoming standard terminology, of when a particular epistemic warrant for its premises *transmits across* an entailment – in some detail in other work.<sup>6</sup> But here we only need one very intuitive thought about it. To wit: a particular warrant for the premises of an entailment is transmitted to its conclusion only when one's path *to* that warrant does not require picking up knowledge of the conclusion en route, or depend on some form of prior entitlement to it. Obviously that condition will not be met in explicitly circular arguments, when the very conclusion features among the premises. But there are other cases where it is contravened in a more subtle manner.

One important class of such cases connects with the holism of empirical confirmation emphasised in the last two sections of Quine's 'Two Dogmas'. Consider some simple examples. At work in my office in New York City, I hear a thunderous rumble and sense a vibration in the building. Is that evidence of an incipient electric storm? Yes, if the sky has darkened and the atmosphere is heavy and still. Probably not, if the sky outside is clear blue, given that my office overlooks Amsterdam Avenue, with its regular cargo of outsize trucks. I see a massive-seeming brownish bird of prey perching on a fence post. A sighting of a golden eagle, perhaps? Quite possibly, if I am in the wilds of Torridon in the north-western Scottish highlands; but not if I am knowingly in mid-Welsh farmland, where buzzards have become quite common.

Such examples suggest that the normal empirical case is *information-dependence* of warrant. A body of evidence,  $e$ , is an information-dependent warrant for a particular proposition  $P$  if whether  $e$  is correctly regarded as warranting  $P$  depends on what one has by way of collateral information. Consider any case in which one's collateral information,  $I$ , does indeed sustain  $e$ 's warranting  $P$  but in which  $e$  could not rationally be regarded as warranting  $P$  if certain elements of  $I$  were missing and uncompensated for. Such a relationship is always liable to generate examples of transmission failure: it will do

so just when the particular *e*, P and I have the feature that needed elements of the relevant I are themselves entailed by P (together perhaps with other warranted premises). In that case, any warrant supplied by *e* for P will not be transmissible to those elements of I. Warrant would be transmitted in such a case only if a rational thinker could cite as her ground for accepting I the fact that she has warrant for P together with the entailment. No rational thinker could do that if the warrant for P supplied by *e* depends on prior and independent warrant for I in the first place.

To fix ideas, here are four simple examples of that shape. First, (AIRPORT): suppose you are waiting in an airport lounge and:

- (*e*) You hear the agent utter the words, 'This is a final boarding call for Northwest's flight NW644 to Minneapolis'.

So you naturally infer:

- (P) The agent has just intentionally forewarned passengers in English of final boarding for NW644.

P entails:

- (I) The agent understands (some of) a language (English).

But clearly the warrant bestowed on P by *e* does not transmit across this entailment from P to I. Rather, it is only in a context of collateral information in which I is already justifiably assumed that *e* provides a warrant for P.

Or consider (TWINS). Jessica and Jocelyn are identical twins whom you know well but have difficulty distinguishing. Suppose:

- (*e*) You see a girl approaching you who looks just like Jessica.

There is a defeasible inference from that to:

- (P) That girl is Jessica.

and an entailment from there to:

- (I) That girl is not Jocelyn.

But given your discriminatory limitations, there is no question of treating *e* as a warrant for P and then transmitting it across the entailment to conclude I. Rather, you – though not perhaps someone who can distinguish the twins purely visually – will need the latter already in place as collateral information before you can reasonably take *e* as a warrant for P.

Third, consider (SOCCER), involving as evidence:

- (e) Jones has just headed the ball into the net, he is being congratulated by team-mates and the crowd has gone wild.

That provides a defeasible warrant for:

- (P) Jones has just scored a goal.

which entails (assuming that it is only in the context of a soccer game that a soccer goal can be scored) that:

- (I) A game of soccer is taking place.

But suppose the circumstances are special: you are in the vicinity of a film studio which specialises in making sporting movies, and you know that it is just as likely that the witnessed scene is specially staged for the camera as that it is an event in a genuine game. Once you are equipped with this information, you will rightly regard *e* as providing *no* warrant for *P*. What you need, if *e* is to provide a warrant for *P*, is precisely some *independent* corroboration of the context – that is, of *I*. You ask a bystander: is that a genuine game or a film take? If you learn that the game is genuine, you acquire a warrant for the claim that a goal was just scored. But it would be absurd to regard that warrant as transmissible across the entailment from *P* to *I*. You do not get any *additional* reason for thinking that a game is in process by having the warrant for *P*. It remains that your *only* ground for *I* is the bystander's testimony and it is only because you have that ground that witnessing the scene provides a warrant for *P* at all.

Finally, compare (ELECTION):

- (e) Jones has just placed an X on a ballot paper in that booth.

- (P) Jones has just voted.

- (I) An election is taking place.

Again, we have, in *e*, a good but defeasible warrant for *P*, which in turn entails *I*. But suppose the context is that of a society which holds electoral drills – practice elections – rather as we now hold fire drills. And suppose that they are held pretty much as frequently as real elections, so that – unless we have some further relevant background information – it is as likely that Jones is participating in a drill as in the real thing. Then in this situation, Jones' writing an X on a ballot paper stops providing a warrant – even a defeasible one – for his voting. If all we know is that a drill is as likely as the real thing,

and that Jones has written an X on a ballot paper, we have no better reason to suppose that he has voted than to suppose that he has not. However, given independent corroboration of I, *e* once again becomes a warrant for P – only, for exactly analogous reasons as before, not one transmissible across the entailment to I.<sup>7</sup>

The form of scepticism that I want to elicit by reflection on Moore's 'Proof' will begin, plausibly enough, by claiming an analogy between the 'Proof' and the foregoing examples. The sceptic will insist that Moore did not formulate his 'Proof' properly – that he begins in the wrong place, since his premise is something which rests on more basic evidence and is thus more properly viewed as a lemma. A more explicit formulation would rather be something like this (MOORE):

- (e) My current state of consciousness seems in all respects like being aware of a hand held up in front of my face.

(P) Here is a hand.

Therefore:

- (I) There is a material world (since any hand is a material object existing in space).

What Moore requires is that the defeasible warrant recorded by (MOORE) *e* for the belief in (MOORE) P is transmissible across the inference from that belief to the conclusion that there is a material world. The sceptical riposte will then be that the proper formulation of the 'Proof' exemplifies exactly the template for transmission failure latterly illustrated: that the status of Moore's experience as a warrant for his original premise, 'Here is a hand', is not unconditional but depends on needed ancillary information and that paramount among the hypotheses that need to be in place in order for the putative warrant for the premise – Moore's state of consciousness – to have the evidential force that Moore assumes is the hypothesis that there is indeed a material world whose characteristics are mostly, at least in the large, disclosed in what we take to be routine sense experience. So Moore's original 'Proof' begs the question: its premise (P) is warranted only if Moore is independently entitled to its conclusion, just as in the other four illustrations.

Now, this scepticism is implicitly taking it, of course, that perceptual warrant is indirect: that in acquiring such a warrant, one starts with something more basic – information about the character of one's own state of consciousness – and then moves by a defeasible step to a claim about the local environment. This idea would go with a broadly Lockean view of experience as drawing a kind of 'veil' between the subject and the external world – a mode of activity within an inner theatre, whose specific happenings would be

intrinsically indifferent to whether they occurred in a dream, or in an episode of veridical perception, or in a delusion in waking life. But – it is important to realise – the sceptical argument doesn't need the Lockean view. The essence of the former is that our beliefs about the local perceptible environment have their rational basis in elements of our own *subjectivity* – in how things are with us. It is perfectly consistent with this to grant, as against Locke and in sympathy with those philosophers who have urged that we think of perception as a form of direct acquaintance with the world, that perceiving and, say, dreaming are states of consciousness of a quite different *logical structure*, with literally nothing in common (what has come to be known as the disjunctivist view<sup>8</sup>). For (MOORE) *e* can still serve, even so, as a *neutral description* – neutral, that is to say, with respect to which of the possible 'disjuncts' a present state of consciousness exemplifies – of one's subjective informational state. And the thought is so far unchallenged that it is on information so conceived that the ultimate justification for our perceptual beliefs must rest. Once one accepts that thought, the comparison of Moore's 'Proof' with the four examples and the resultant diagnosis provided of its intuitively question-begging character – that it overlooks the information-dependence of the most basic kind of evidence for perceptual claims – is, I think, compelling. In any case, one kind of material world scepticism certainly so conceives the justificational architecture of perceptual claims. So Moore is begging the question against that adversary at least.<sup>9</sup>

Clearly, though, to recognise that there is a transmission failure involved in, for example, (ELECTION) and (SOCCER) (in the contexts described) does not itself invite *scepticism* about the existence of elections and soccer games. Likewise the collapse of Moore's 'Proof' does not, by itself, invite scepticism about the material world. The form of sceptical argument that now confronts us turns on pressing this question: what – if Moore's warrant for his original premise is information-dependent – could put the needed collateral information (in particular, that there is a material world) in place? Not an inference from any specific proposition about it – that would beg the question, just as Moore did. But how on earth else? The emergent sceptical challenge denies that there is any other way. Specifically, it involves these *five claims*:

- 1 That there is no way of justifying particular beliefs about the material world save on the basis of the (inconclusive) evidence provided by our states of consciousness.
- 2 Such evidence for any particular proposition about the material world depends for its force on collateral information that the material world so much as exists – it would not be warranted to treat how things seem to us as evidence for claims about our immediate physical environment if we were antecedently agnostic about the existence of a material world.

Ergo:

- 3 Our belief that there is a material world cannot without circularity be based on an accumulation of such evidence for the truth of particular propositions about it.
- 4 But there is *nothing else* on which a belief in the existence of the material world might be rationally based.
- 5 And that belief needs justification since it is a simple, if very general contingency and could, after all, be false.

It is, of course, the counterparts of claim 5 that – by ordinary standards of confirmation – fail for the case of (SOCCER) and (ELECTION). But if each of claims 1 to 5 is accepted, then the upshot is that our entire ‘language game’ concerning the material world turns out to be based upon an assumption for which we have no ground whatever, can in principle get no ground whatever, and which could – for all we know – be false. That seems about as strong a sceptical conclusion as one could wish for (or hope to avoid).

An argument – better: paradox – of this kind will be available whenever we are persuadable (at least temporarily) that the ultimate justification for one kind of claim – let’s say: a *type II proposition* – rests upon defeasible inference from information of another sort – *type I propositions*. In any such case, the warrantability of the inference will arguably depend upon the presupposition that there is indeed a domain of fact apt to confer truth on type II propositions in the first place, a domain whose details are broadly reflected in type I information. So it will depend, a fortiori, on the first component of that: that a domain of fact that type II propositions are distinctively apt to describe so much as exists. Let this supposition be the relevant *type III proposition*. It is a proposition of sufficient generality to be entailed by any type II proposition. The schematic form of the emergent sceptical argument – I’ll call it the *I-II-III argument* – is then this:

Type II propositions can only be justified on the evidence of type I propositions.

The evidence provided by type I propositions for type II propositions is information-dependent, requiring *inter alia* collateral warrant for a type III proposition.

So: type III propositions cannot be warranted by transmission of evidence provided by type I propositions for type II propositions across a type II to type III entailment.

But: type III propositions cannot be warranted any other way.

And: type III propositions could be false.

This form of argument is very widely applicable. It may be used, for instance, to provide a simple crystallisation of each of scepticism about other minds, about the past, and about inductive inference. Consider the following reasoning (PAIN) by a subject who is a bystander at a sporting injury:

- I Jones' shin bone is visibly shattered and he is thrashing about on the turf. His face is contorted and he is yelling and screaming.
- II Jones is in pain.

Therefore:

- III There are other minds.

The sceptical argument is exactly as schematised. It will assert that it is only if we have independent warrant for (PAIN) III (and that Jones is very probably 'minded'), that (PAIN) I may legitimately be taken to confirm (PAIN) II. The evidential bearing of (PAIN) I on (PAIN) II is not something which is appreciable from a standpoint which starts out agnostic about the existence of other minds. So, like 'There is a material world', the role of the proposition 'There are other minds' seems to be, as it were, institutional. And that, sceptically construed, is just a polite way of saying that there is no prospect of any kind of independent justification for it, nor therefore for *bona fide* justification of the particular beliefs about others' mental states which it mediates.

It is doubtless superfluous to run through the parallel considerations concerning (SEAWEED):

- I There is a line of fresh seaweed on the beach some fifty yards above the ocean.
- II The seaweed was washed up by the tide some hours ago.

Therefore:

- III The world did not come into being ten seconds ago replete with apparent traces of a more extended history.

and (BASIC INDUCTION):

- I All observed As have been Bs.

## II All As are Bs.

Therefore:

III Some properties are exceptionlessly co-instantiated with others  
(nature is uniform – at least to some extent).

Notice that in no case is it being claimed that the relevant type III proposition provides information *sufficient* to justify the relevant I-to-II transition. The suggestion is rather that collateral information encompassing that proposition is at least *necessary* if the type I proposition is to support the type II proposition; and that the opportunities for acquiring that necessary collateral information are limited in the manner indicated by the generalised versions of the first four of the five claims given above.

Although the I-II-III pattern of sceptical argument has this wide potential generality, there is no initial reason, of course, why the most effective responses to it should be uniform through its various applications. In particular, when it is applied to our beliefs concerning the material world, many philosophers will be tempted by one of two kinds of riposte whose generalisation to other cases would be stretched, or even definitely mistaken. First, some may simply want to reject the inferential architecture which the argument presupposes. According to the argument, the ultimate warrant for claims about the local perceptible environment is supplied by inference from aspects of our subjectivity – from propositions about how things are with us (no matter whether that in turn is given a Lockean or disjunctivist cast). Yet these propositions, for their part, are then conceived as known *non-inferentially*. The question may therefore occur: with what right is the domain of non-inferential warrant – presupposed, of course, if there is to be such a thing as inferential warrant at all – restricted in this way and not allowed to extend outward in the first place to propositions concerning the experienced world? Second, even if that question has a good answer, and we are forced to acknowledge the inferential base for claims about the material world in propositions about subjectivity, there is still scope to question whether the evidential bearing of the latter *is* properly viewed as information-dependent – whether the evidence of appearances does not rather – in the best circumstances – provide a priori *unconditional* (though defeasible) support for propositions about local perceptibles.<sup>10</sup> If either of these reservations could be made good, the framework demanded by I-II-III scepticism about the material world would be undermined.<sup>11</sup>

However, the plausibility of these two forms of riposte diminishes when we move to other subject matters. While there are temptations – evinced in the treatment of the notion of a *criterion* in the first generation of commentary on the *Philosophical Investigations* – to try to make out that agents' behaviour provides information-independent (though still defeasible) grounds for claims

about their mental states, it would seem – to this writer at least – merely quixotic to attempt to construe claims about others' attitudes and sensations as having a non-inferential epistemology.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, neither tactic seems at all plausible for the case of claims about the remote past (the past beyond living memory). And when it comes to simple empirical induction, the first tactic amounts to a denial of a datum of the problem – that induction is a kind of defeasible *inference* – while the powerful intuitive tug of Hume's problem is testimony to the sense we have that, strictly, the justifiability of this pattern of inference does indeed call for a piece of information (the principle of the Uniformity of Nature: that is, the continuing inductive amenability of the world) for which, as generations of philosophers have found, it is hard to make out any warrant.

Our concern now is nevertheless going to be with one possibility for a uniform response – perhaps better: a uniform *attitude* – to I-II-III scepticism. This will involve pursuing an idea that features in *On Certainty* but in a way that Wittgenstein himself did not explicitly develop it, and doing so in a spirit – perhaps – that is in some respects at odds with his later philosophy of language. The crux will be to point to a possible case that we are within our epistemic rights, as it were, in accepting the type III propositions that we do, their evidential predicament notwithstanding.

## 2 Norms of enquiry

The preoccupation of *On Certainty*<sup>13</sup> with Moore's two papers, even when Moore is not being explicitly mentioned, is evident to anyone who reads it with those discussions in mind. Perhaps the single most prominent and distinctive theme of these last writings of Wittgenstein is his insistence on a contrast, missing from Moore, between knowledge properly so regarded – that is, a state of cognitive *achievement*, based on completed enquiry – and a much wider class of *certainties*: propositions which 'stand fast' for us not because they have won through under scrutiny of relevant evidence but because, so he suggests, they are somehow presuppositional and basic in the very process of gathering and assessing evidence or within our more general 'world picture'. He writes:

I should like to say: Moore does not *know* what he asserts he knows, but it stands fast for him, as also for me; regarding it as absolutely solid is part of our *method* of doubt and enquiry.

I do not explicitly learn the propositions that stand fast for me. I can *discover* them subsequently like the axis around which a body rotates. This axis is not fixed in the sense that anything holds it fast, but the movement around it determines its immobility.

(OC 151–2)

Here the image of the axis is crucial. Its point is that nothing *external* holds these basic certainties in place: they are not established, solid foundations after the fashion of the classical Cartesian aspiration – foundations of the kind which primitive and especially sure cognitive achievements would provide:

... I did not get my picture of the world by satisfying myself of its correctness; nor do I have it because I am satisfied of its correctness. No: it is the inherited background against which I distinguish between true and false.

(OC 94)

So far from being products of empirical investigation – cognitive achievements – Wittgenstein is proposing that the propositions in question play a pivotal role in our *methodology* of empirical investigation and thereby contribute to the background necessary to make cognitive achievement possible, a background without which the acquisition of knowledge would be frustrated by a lack of *regulation*:

The propositions describing this world-picture might be part of a kind of mythology. And their role is like that of rules of a game; and the game can be learned purely practically, without learning any explicit rules.

(OC 95)

*The truth*

– he had better mean: not the fact of the truth but our *acceptance* as true –

of certain empirical propositions belongs to our frame of reference.

(OC 83)

A little more explicitly:

Here I am inclined to fight windmills, because I cannot yet say the thing I really want to say.

I want to say: propositions of the form of empirical propositions, and not only propositions of logic, form the foundation of all operating with thoughts (with language). – This observation is not of the form ‘I know . . .’. ‘I know . . .’ states what *I* know, and that is not of logical interest.

(OC 400–1)

This sheds light on the character of Wittgenstein’s interest in Moore’s discussions. What, it would seem, impressed him about ‘A Defense of Common

Sense' in particular was not its official line – Moore's insistence that 'I know, with certainty' each of the propositions he listed there, while conceding that he did not know their 'correct analysis' – but the *contents* of the list and the remainder of the special place of these propositions which Moore, almost without realising it, contrived to provide:

When Moore says he *knows* such and such, he is really enumerating a lot of empirical propositions which we affirm without special testing; propositions, that is, which have a peculiar logical role in the system of our empirical propositions.

Even if the most trustworthy of men assures me that he *knows* things are thus and so, this by itself cannot satisfy me that he does know. Only that he believes he knows. That is why Moore's assurance that he knows . . . does not interest us. The propositions, however, which Moore retails as examples of such known truths are indeed interesting. Not because anyone knows their truth, or believes he knows them, but because they all have a *similar* role in the system of our empirical judgements.

We don't, for example, arrive at any of them as a result of investigation.

There are e.g. historical investigations and investigations into the shape and also the age of the earth, but not into whether the earth has existed during the last hundred years. Of course many of us have information about this period from our parents and grandparents; but mayn't they be wrong? – 'Nonsense!' one will say. 'How should all these people be wrong?' – But is that an argument? Is it not simply the rejection of an idea? And perhaps the determination of a concept? For if I speak of a possible mistake here, this changes the role of 'mistake' and 'truth' in our lives.

(OC 136–8)

The immediate and crucial issue, of course, is what exactly the 'peculiar logical role' of the propositions in question is supposed to be.

*On Certainty* presents a number of ideas about that. One relatively clear and salient notion is proposed in the passage which introduces the famous metaphor of the river-bed. It runs in full as follows:

It might be imagined that some propositions, of the form of empirical propositions, were hardened and functioned as channels for such empirical propositions as were not hardened but fluid; and that this relation altered with time, in that fluid propositions hardened, and hard ones became fluid.

The mythology<sup>14</sup> may change back into a state of flux, the river-bed of thoughts may shift. But I distinguish between the movement

of the waters on the river-bed and the shift of the bed itself; though there is not a sharp division of the one from the other.

But if someone were to say ‘So logic too is an empirical science’ he would be wrong. Yet this is right: the same proposition may get treated at one time as something to test by experience, at another as a rule of testing.

And the bank [sic] of that river consists partly of hard rock, subject to no alteration or only to an imperceptible one, partly of sand, which now in one place now in another gets washed away, or deposited.

(OC 96–9)

This passage is commonly – and naturally – read as resonating with the so-called Duhem–Quine thesis, that propositions confront experience not individually but in integrated clusters, thereby presenting a range of revisionary options when awkward cases arise.<sup>15</sup> The ‘hardened’ propositions would then be those to which we accord a relative (or even something verging on absolute) immobility, so that the revisionary impact is channelled, via the lines of integration, elsewhere.

Although Wittgenstein was explicitly setting his sights on ‘propositions of the form of empirical propositions, and not only propositions of logic’, he was – like Quine after him, and independently – attracted by this thought as an account – or reconstruction – of our intuitive conception of the *necessity* (or analyticity: Quine made no distinction) of logic and mathematics (‘the hardness of the logical *must*’ (RFM I 121)). Necessity, on this proposal, is a matter of (near-) absolute *entrenchment*: the necessity of  $13 + 7 = 20$ , for instance, consists in the fact that we so use that proposition that nothing is allowed to falsify it.<sup>16</sup> Imagine that you count the pieces of fruit in a bowl containing just satsumas and bananas. You get thirteen satsumas and then seven bananas but when you count all the fruits together, you get twenty-one. Yet you seem to have made no mistake, and no piece of fruit is added or removed – so it seems – during the three counts. So you have evidence for each of the following four propositions individually:

- that there are thirteen satsumas in the bowl;
- that there are seven bananas in the bowl;
- that there are twenty-one pieces of fruit in the bowl;
- that every piece of fruit in the bowl is a satsuma or a banana.

Then, according to the mooted account, the necessity of  $13 + 7 = 20$  is somehow grounded in the fact that such appearances are not *allowed* collectively to stand as veridical. Rather, we inexorably dismiss them out of hand – ‘You must have miscounted somewhere’, ‘Another piece of fruit must somehow have been slipped in’, etc.<sup>17</sup> The rule is that the proposition that  $13 + 7 = 20$

is to ‘stand fast’, so the appearances are accordingly discounted and an obligation thereby created – if the situation is to be explained – that fault be found with at least one in particular of the four propositions and hence with the evidence that provides for the appearance of their simultaneous truth:

The mathematical proposition has, as it were officially, been given the stamp of incontestability, i.e.: ‘Dispute about other things; *this* is immovable – it is a hinge on which your dispute can turn.’

(OC 655)

However – its distinguished provenance notwithstanding – there is cause to regard this as a quite misguided proposal about logical and mathematical necessity. In effect, it conflates necessity with confidence.<sup>18</sup> The judgement that a proposition, *P*, holds of necessity may without any incongruity be quite *tentative*, and this tentativeness may extend to the judgement that *P* itself. That will be the situation, for instance, wherever one judges tentatively that *P* but confidently that if *P*, then necessarily *P*. There are such cases even when the necessity in question is conceptual. An example might be a formal axiom proposed as a faithful capture of some informal mathematical concept, or a purported explication of one, such as Church’s Thesis. The judgement that *P* is necessary is a (possibly qualified) judgement *about* *P* with a particular content – the content, roughly, that the proposition may be relied upon in reasoning about an arbitrary *hypothetical* situation. It is not (just) a judgement *of* *P* – i.e. of *P*’s *actual* truth – made with especial sureness. It is simply a muddle to identify the two.

Although the Wittgensteinian (Quinean) idea therefore offers a lame account of the *meaning* of a claim of logical or mathematical necessity, we can acknowledge that the *kind of usage* to which the quoted passages from *On Certainty* invite attention is nevertheless importantly characteristic of basic logical and mathematical propositions in empirical application. But presumably Wittgenstein meant more than merely to log a reminder of this aspect of their use. Individual experiences, when they are mistaken, do not themselves communicate that they are. The conception of experience as a *fallible* indicator of how matters stand in the world is wholly dependent on our possession of principles for appraising *clusters* of experiences and adjudging them collectively misleading – ‘recalcitrant’ in Quine’s favoured vocabulary. If we lacked any principled way of undertaking such appraisal, we would lack the means for empirical belief revision and thereby – arguably – empirical belief itself. Wittgenstein’s underlying idea, prominent in both *On Certainty* and the *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics*, is that (some of) the needed principles of appraisal are provided in the guise of the certainties of elementary logic and mathematics; and that the unwavering – dogmatic – confidence we repose in these propositions, rather than being the product of a different kind of – superlatively sure, a priori – form of cognition, at-

taches to them in their role as, in effect, *rules*: norms of enquiry whose job it is to regulate the appraisal of empirical evidence after the fashion I illustrated whereby the proposition that  $13 + 7 = 20$  determines that the experiences which motivate the four listed propositions may not all be allowed to stand as veridical.

This general idea contrasts with a more traditional, rationalist way of seeing things. According to traditional rationalism, the non-veridicality of the pool of experiences which collectively motivate the four listed propositions would be regarded as a *priori* fact: it is, as it were, *already* the case that the four propositions are mutually inconsistent, whatever principles of appraisal we do or do not use, and a sound arithmetic had better respect the point. On this view, logic and mathematics are answerable to predetermined constraints incorporated in the antecedent meanings of the statements among which they provide for inferential traffic. The rejection of this general conception is a dominant theme of the *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics*.<sup>19</sup> It belongs with the general rejection in Wittgenstein's later work of the broad conception of the relationship between language and the world which he had lionised in the *Tractatus*, and the associated invention of a category of 'grammatical' propositions whose role, rather than to reflect aspects of any supposed kind of logical, mathematical or metaphysical reality, is to regulate the language game and thereby to play a role in constituting the meanings of moves within it.

What is new in *On Certainty* is the extension of this radical and problematical thought to empirical-seeming propositions, and also its qualification – allowing for its extension to yet a further range of examples – in two ways. First, it is now emphasised that the resilience accorded to such norms in the face of awkward experiences need not be absolute – it can be a matter of degree, so that a proposition which functions for a time as a norm may eventually, in the light of empirical developments, be deprived that role.<sup>20</sup> That kind of shift is explicitly canvassed in the river-bed passage and it is, of course, precisely the kind of transformation which Quine, in 'Two Dogmas', urged as a possibility even for basic logic and mathematics. Second, the regulative role of empirical propositions that have been 'hardened' may be relativised to context, so that a proposition which in some circumstances functions as a norm of empirical enquiry may in others be its object. Such is the status, Wittgenstein suggests, of 'I have two hands':

My having two hands is, in normal circumstances, as certain as anything that I could produce in evidence for it.

That is why I am not in position to take the sight of my hand as evidence for it.

(OC 250)

In normal circumstances, 'I have two hands' will function as a norm. My

certainty that I have two hands will ‘stand fast’ above the flow of evidence making, e.g. the sight of my hands into a confirmation of the functioning of my visual system, rather than of their existence. By the same token, were I to have a – visual, or tactful – impression that I did *not* have two hands, then I should treat it just on that account as unreliable. But of course in abnormal circumstances – when I am recovering consciousness after surgery in which doctors have tried to save my badly damaged hand, or emerging in shock from the debris of a terrorist bomb attack – the proposition becomes a straightforwardly empirical one.

Against this, there is an inclination to protest that – rather than calling attention to any rule-like function – the example merely attests to the differing degrees of *empirical* confidence that may attach to one and the same proposition in different circumstances. But I do not think Wittgenstein needs to be read as saying anything antithetical to the idea that one’s confidence, for example that one has two hands, is ultimately empirically based. The thrust is rather that if your certainty that you have two hands would dominate a sensory impression that represented them as *missing*, then you are implicitly prioritising one kind of evidence – something like: your lifelong experience of yourself as handed, together with the absence from your experience of any worrying tendency of material objects abruptly and inexplicably to go missing – over another. And that priority is not itself justified by *experience*:

But isn’t it experience that teaches us to judge like *this*, that is to say, that it is correct to judge like this? But how does experience *teach* us, then? *We* may derive it from experience, but experience does not direct us to derive anything from experience. If it is the *ground* of our judging like this, and not just the cause, still we do not have a ground for seeing this in turn as a ground.

(OC 130)

When a statement such as ‘I have two hands’ functions as a norm of description, it may still express an empirically based belief. But the Wittgensteinian point is that its normative role is not imposed by that empirical basis. In treating the proposition as a norm, we are implicitly taking it that the basis in question constitutes *superior* evidence. And it is not itself a thesis justified by experience that the evidence in question is superior:

What counts as an adequate test of a statement belongs to logic. It belongs to the description of the language-game.

(OC 82)

Again: norms-in-context, as we might call them, may have evidential support drawn from outside the relevant context. But if they do, their relative certainty will reflect an assessment of the weight of that support which is

not itself evidentially grounded but belongs with the ‘logic’ of the language-game.

### 3 Other ‘hinges’

‘Hardened’ propositions are, however, only one of a number of different kinds of example offered in Wittgenstein’s notes of the overarching idea expressed in the following celebrated passage:

... the *questions* that we raise and our *doubts* depend on the fact that some propositions are exempt from doubt, are as it were like hinges on which those turn.

That is to say, it belongs to the logic of our scientific investigations that certain things are *in deed* not doubted.

But it isn’t that the situation is like this: We just *can’t* investigate everything, and for that reason we are forced to rest content with assumption. If I want the door to turn, the hinges must stay put.

My *life* consists in my being content to accept many things.

(OC 341–4)

That overarching idea is, roughly that empirical practice – having a ‘life’ – presupposes unearned certainties, propositions ‘exempt from doubt’. Propositions which serve in one way or another as rules for our ‘scientific investigations’ are natural candidates for such ‘hinge’ status. But how far does the range of unearned certainties extend? Maybe mathematical propositions have ‘as it were officially, been given the stamp of incontestability’ but, Wittgenstein writes:

... one can *not* say that of the proposition that *I* am called L.W. Nor of the proposition that such-and-such people have calculated such-and-such a problem correctly.

(OC 656)

This is a peculiar passage. To be sure, the proposition which identifies my name would be naturally classified along with ‘I have two hands’ as a potential norm-in-context: a proposition whose relative certainty would dominate *prima facie* evidence to the contrary – for instance, the persistent delivery to my home of mail addressed otherwise – in much the manner in which ‘I have two hands’ might dominate a failure to perceive one’s hands when very cold in pitch darkness. So OC 656 might reasonably be taken as emphasising a difference between norms-in-context and ‘officially’ incontestable, or ‘fossilised’ (OC 657) propositions, like those of simple mathematics. But then what are we to make of Wittgenstein’s pairing of ‘I am called L.W.’ with – to make what I take it is an irrelevant reformulation – ‘This calculation has been done

correctly'. Norms-in-context present what we may call *standing* certainties – certainties one *brings to* any normal context, as contrasted with convictions *acquired in* a particular context. But that such-and-such a calculation has been done correctly would be verified by a routine investigation – it would seem to be a case of normal *knowledge*, resting on cognitive achievement and concerning a specific situation. It does not seem to be, in the sense that interests us, a 'hinge' at all. So what comparison is Wittgenstein making?

Possibly this. It is a common characteristic of some standing certainties – like 'I am called so-and-so' – and some contextually acquired ones – like 'That calculation has been done correctly' – that our confidence in them is fundamental in the sense that disturbing it would be epistemically catastrophic:

... not only do I never have the slightest doubt that I am called that, but there is no judgement I could be certain of if I started doubting about that.

(OC 490)<sup>21</sup>

To doubt that I rightly take my name to be 'Crispin Wright' would have the effect of putting in jeopardy a huge amount of what I normally take for granted about myself – how could I be mistaken about my name unless I am mistaken about enormously much else besides? A shadow would be cast over all of the large framework of personal beliefs in which my life – my history, family and projects – are defined for me, and thereby implicitly over all the routine empirical means by which I have arrived at them and had them reinforced on countless occasions. But *this* is true of some contextually acquired certainties as well: how could I be mistaken about the correctness of this calculation (after I have checked and double-checked it, asked you to do the same, and so on) without calling into question the reliability of my best methods of checking such things and indeed my senses and faculties in general?

If I don't trust *this* evidence, why should I trust *any* evidence?

(OC 672, second emphasis added)

So Wittgenstein appears to have in mind at least two different distinctions: on the one hand, that between rules governing enquiry and the propositional objects of enquiry; and on the other, that between beliefs whose revision would consist with our general methodology for appraising belief and beliefs to jettison which would be potentially catastrophic, leaving us with no principled conception of what kind of evidence might generally be relied upon in other contexts. But there is an underlying more general notion: it is the idea of a 'hinge' proposition as a kind of 'certainty of methodology', as it were – a proposition a doubt about which would somehow commit one to doubting

not just particular beliefs which we already hold but aspects of the way we habitually appraise beliefs, ‘our method of doubt and enquiry’.

Very well. But how does this incipient taxonomy connect with the kind of ‘hinge’ illustrated in this passage?

I have a telephone conversation with New York. My friend tells me that his young trees have buds of such and such a kind. I am now convinced that his tree is . . . . Am I also convinced that the earth exists?

The existence of the earth is rather part of the whole *picture* which forms the starting-point of belief for me.

Does my telephone call to New York strengthen my conviction that the earth exists?

Much seems to be fixed, and it is removed from the traffic. It is so to speak shunted onto an unused siding.

Now it gives our way of looking at things, and our researches, their form. Perhaps it was once disputed. But perhaps, for unthinkable ages, it has belonged to the *scaffolding* of our thoughts. (Every human being has parents.)

(OC 208–11)

Here, strikingly, Wittgenstein comes close<sup>22</sup> to formulating an example of the very character I used earlier to illustrate failures of transmission:

- (e) My New York friend tells me over the phone that his trees have buds of such and such a kind.
- (P) His trees do have buds of such-and such a kind.

So:

- (I) The Earth exists.

The initial question of OC 210 is of course rhetorical – there is no question of transmission of the warrant supplied by *e* for *P* across the entailment to *I*. But the metaphor of ‘shunting onto an unused siding’, followed by ‘Perhaps it was once disputed’, reveals that Wittgenstein is not fully clear about what is here in effect a type III proposition – about what is distinctive about it. If a proposition is to serve as a norm of enquiry in the manner of either of the two models earlier distinguished – the respective models of ‘ $13 + 7 = 20$ ’ and ‘I have two hands’ – then it has to be such as to allow of at least *potentially* disconfirming experience. If it is to be significant to speak of exempting a proposition from doubt, it has first to be such that experience might otherwise, in a context of suitable other beliefs, call it into question

– might seem to go against it. And whatever its merit as a proposal about the status in our thought of some of his examples, this general idea is not apt for propositions like ‘The earth exists’ (OC 210), ‘The earth has existed during the last hundred years’ (OC 138), ‘The earth has existed for many years past’ (OC 411) and ‘This table remains in existence when no one is paying attention to it’ (OC 163).<sup>23</sup> There is no content in the image of our long ago removing ‘The earth exists’ from the hurly-burly of empirical rail traffic unless we can envisage how the use of that proposition might have gone in a setting *before* it got ‘shunted onto an unused siding’ – becoming part of the ‘scaffolding’ of our thought. But what might we *ever* have counted as potential evidence *against* the existence of the earth? Here there is simply no clear content to the idea of even a *prima facie* disconfirmation, so any comparison with norms-in-context or more completely ‘fossilised’ norms is inappropriate. Evidence cannot count against a type III proposition – if it could, it could count *for* the hypothesis that there is indeed no material world (or that all other humans are zombies, that the world is indeed no more than five seconds old and that there are no inductive regularities).

The other point of comparison – that a doubt would involve extensive undermining of investigative procedures and norms of assessment – is more apt. Suspension of confidence in a type III proposition would indeed have the effect of undermining a whole genre of evidence and thereby disabling all empirical enquiry – into the past, or the future, or the external material world, or the mental states of others – of one particular very general kind. But there is a difference here as well, to do with *how* a doubt would generate this destructive effect. Before, we had in view a class of propositions doubting which would mean doubting the weight of a body of evidence which is normally taken overwhelmingly to support them, and therefore being forced to doubt the relevance of that evidence; in short, propositions such that, as Wittgenstein puts it, everything speaks for them and nothing against them (OC 203). But in doubting a type III proposition, one would not be setting oneself against any overwhelming body of evidence. We don’t have any evidence for them, for it is a peculiarity of their situation that they are beyond *supportive* evidence too. As the sceptical argument shows, if confidence in them were once suspended, no evidence could make it rational to reinstate them again.

#### 4 Scepticism unhinged?

Let’s take stock. No doubt a much more fine-grained account of Wittgenstein’s (and Moore’s) examples would be possible, but we have done enough to suggest the following loose generic characterisation of the ‘hinges on which our doubts turn’. Such beliefs are ones whose rejection would rationally necessitate extensive reorganisation of – or more, might even just throw into confusion – our highly complex conception of what kind of thing should

be taken as evidence for what kind of proposition. We have observed three salient classifications:

- 1 propositions (simple arithmetical equalities, 'I have two hands') which it is our practice, always or normally, to insulate from disconfirming evidence, and which thereby serve as, in effect, rules for the evaluation – re-direction – of the significance of such evidence;
- 2 propositions ('My name is C.W.', 'This calculation is correct') which are supported by – by normal standards – an overwhelming body of evidence, whose significance would have to be overridden if they were doubted;
- 3 propositions of type III ('The earth exists', 'Physical objects continue to exist when unperceived', 'The earth has existed for many years past') to doubt which would have the effect of undermining our confidence in a whole species of proposition, by calling into question the bearing of our most basic kinds of evidence for propositions of that kind.

These groupings capture, as we have seen, a variety of significantly different kinds of case, the most important dimension of difference being what kind of evidential support their members in principle allow of or whether they allow of evidential support at all. The cases are, however, unified – so I read Wittgenstein as suggesting – by their constituting or reflecting our implicit acceptance of various kinds of *rules of evidence*: rules for assessing the specific bearing of evidence among a range of germane propositions, rules for assessing the priorities among different kinds of evidence, and rules connecting certain kinds of evidence with certain kinds of subject matter. One dominant theme of *On Certainty* is that some things that Moore misguidedly took himself to know are actually effectively the articulation, in declarative propositional garb, of such rules, our unhesitating acceptance of which allows for no defence in terms of the idea of knowledge. And the reader forms the impression – though I do not know that it could be decisively corroborated by explicit quotation – that it was meant to go with that theme that our accepting the propositions in question is likewise not to be *criticised* in terms of the idea of *failure* of knowledge. The Sceptic's attack was to be pre-empted by the same idea that undercuts Moore's 'Defense'.

But how *exactly* might the reflections outlined contribute towards the dissolution of sceptical doubt? The central thrust of knowledge-sceptical argument, of whatever stripe, is, after all, precisely that what we count as the acquisition of knowledge, or justification, rests on groundless presuppositions. So, far from saying anything to offset that charge, Wittgenstein seems open to the complaint that he has merely elaborated the theme. How does it help to have a reminder in detail of the various *kinds* of groundless assumption that we make? So long as it is uncontested that these assumptions *are* both essential – in the sense that we cannot avoid them – and groundless – in the

sense that we can produce no reason for thinking them to be true – isn’t the sceptical point effectively taken? Yet Wittgenstein is completely explicit:

At the foundation of well founded belief lies belief that is not founded.

(OC 253)

Since *On Certainty* is not a sceptical treatise, Wittgenstein’s idea can only be that taking the point about groundlessness doesn’t impose the consequences usually thought to attach to it – in particular, that to recognise that enquiry is inevitably founded on unfounded beliefs need not call all our procedures into question, or expose them as being somehow arbitrary and irrational, or open the flood gates to all manner of prejudice and dogma. But how are those consequences avoided?

It may seem obvious. The key idea, someone may say, is surely that of *rule*. In each of the three kinds of case that we have distinguished, it is the suggestion of *On Certainty* that a proposition’s ‘standing fast’ for us is to be attributed to its playing a role in or reflecting some aspect of *the way we regulate* enquiry, rather than being presumed – erroneously – to be an especially solid *product* of it. Sceptical argument purports to disclose a lack of cognitive pedigree in a targeted range of commitments. Rules, however, *don’t need* a cognitive pedigree. The *merit* of a rule may be discussible: rules can be inept, in various ways. But, since they *define* a practice, they cannot be *wrong*. Any sort of *sceptical* concern about our warrant to accept a proposition whose role is actually to express or otherwise reflect such a rule is thus a kind of *ignoratio elenchi*.<sup>24</sup>

However, the thought is, of course, much too swift. For one thing, it won’t cover all the cases: if the account given of norms-in-context is as proposed above, then their normative status *does* presuppose a degree of cognitive pedigree and might therefore be undercut by a successful sceptical attack on that. But the real trouble is more general. Rules governing a practice can be excused from any external constraint – so just ‘up to us’, as it were – only if the practice itself has no overall point which a badly selected rule might frustrate. But that is hardly how we think of empirical enquiry. Empirical enquiry does par excellence have an overall point, namely – it may seem the merest platitude to say – the divination of what is true and the avoidance of what is false of the world it concerns. So ‘rules of evidence’ must presumably answer to this overall point. It will therefore seem as though there has to be a good question whether and with what right we suppose that the rules we actually rely on in empirical enquiry are conducive to that point. Let it be that the certainty of basic arithmetic, for example, reflects its regulative role, its serving as a constraint upon the acceptance of certain kinds of sequences of appearances as veridical and hence as a control upon the use of statements such as ‘You miscounted somewhere along the line’

and ‘Another object was added to the group while the count was in progress’ which it bids us to affirm when, for example, things do not ‘add up’. Still, these would seem to be claims with an *independent meaning* and – presumably, at least in a wide class of cases – determinate truth-values. To regard simple arithmetic as a compendium of rules for the appraisal of evidence therefore provides no easy escape from the thought that, in making such appraisals, it is a prime desideratum that we not be led to *misassess* the truth-values of such non-arithmetical statements as lie within its sphere of influence. To regard arithmetic – and logic – as regulative of the ‘language-game’ does not enjoin that they should be absolved from *conservativeness* with respect to the correct assessment of the statements whose use they regulate.

An analogous point engages our practices of treating one kind of evidence as superior to another. Of course there is a complex ranking here: it matters, for instance, whether perceptual impressions are repeatable and whether they are single- or multi-sense; how they stack up against memory impressions, and the products of empirical theorising; and how they relate to the testimony of others. I suggested that when an empirical proposition is treated as a norm-in-context – in the fashion of ‘I have two hands’ – that will reflect aspects of this background ranking. But the point of the ranking – one would naturally suppose – is to lead one to give relative weight, in cases of conflict, to the species of evidence that are most likely to promote true belief. So, again, the ranking has an external objective, and one cannot absolve it from all concern about its fitness for that just by reflecting that the priorities it involves have the character for us of rules of procedure.

The case of type III propositions is perhaps the most stark of all. To allow that ‘The earth has existed for many years past’ serves as a rule of evidence – plays a role in determining our conception of the significance of presently available states and processes – is not even superficially in tension with thinking of it as a substantial proposition, apt to be true or false. It goes without saying that our conception of the significance of items of evidence we gather will depend on what kind of world we take ourselves to be living in. That in no way banishes the spectre of profound and sweeping error in the latter regard.

Now, it would be perfectly fair to observe that this general kind of objection belongs with the rationalistic mind-set contrasted above with the outlook on logic and mathematics which permeates the *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics*. It is thus anyway out of kilter with what seems to be the larger idea in Wittgenstein’s later philosophy, underpinning the doctrine of logic and mathematics as ‘antecedent to truth’: the idea that the ‘rules of the language-game’ precisely do *not* have to answer to anything external to it. According to the philosophy of language at work in the *Tractatus*, there was a separation between what constitutes the *meaning* (truth-conditions) of a statement – which is a matter of an essential (in the *Tractatus*, indeed, pictorial) relation between the statement and a potential worldly truth-conferrer

(‘fact’) – and the rules which we accept as governing its *use*. So provision was made for a good metaphysical question about whether the latter are felicitous by the standards set by the former, whether there is the intended general correlation between the obtaining of what we treat as warrant for a statement, which will be a reflection of the rules of the language-game, and the obtaining of what it pictures. By the time of the *Investigations*, by contrast, Wittgenstein had shifted to – indeed, perhaps invented – the type of outlook that Hilary Putnam later dubbed *internal realism* or *internalism*: now, it is our linguistic practice itself that is viewed as conferring meaning on the statements it involves – there is no meaning-conferrer standing apart from the rules of practice and no associated external goal.

The metaphysical crux is thus the idea of truth as an objective of empirical enquiry to which our rules of assessment are at best externally related. If I am to be seriously troubled by the thought that painstaking and conscientious appraisal by the standards of my actual linguistic practice may be consistent with there being massive but undetectable error generated by a quite mistaken conception of some large aspect of the world, then I must be thinking of what determines the *content* of my beliefs as something extrinsic to that practice – with some version of the classical, molecular, truth-conditional account, the only salient type of candidate. But while there is, to my knowledge, no evidence that Wittgenstein ever became uneasy with the opposed internalist vision of meaning and truth that had come to dominate his thinking by time of the *Investigations*, it is at least much less obtrusive in *On Certainty*. True, there are one or two suggestive passages.<sup>25</sup> But such – infrequent – passages do more to raise the issue to which the ultimate intelligibility of sceptical doubt is hostage than to propose a definite stand on it. In taking it for granted (the fifth claim in the schematisation I gave earlier) that type III propositions ‘might just be false’ – as a matter of metaphysical bad luck, as it were – I-II-III scepticism sets out its stall against the internalism of the *Investigations*. The type III proposition is simply conceived as fitting the way of the world or not, whatever grip on the matter may or may not be possible for us. But if Wittgenstein at the time of his last notes regarded that view of such propositions as scepticism’s Achilles heel, he did not pause – beyond the suggestion that the idea of their ‘agreement with reality’ has no ‘clear application’ – to elaborate an opposing internalist perspective on them.

What might such an internalist perspective be like? In ‘Facts and Certainty’ I began – in effect though not under that description – to outline one such account. The key thought was that scepticism might be made to succumb to a kind of irony: that the very evidential isolation of type III propositions could have the effect that they cease to qualify, properly speaking, as ‘factual’ – as propositions whose content fits them robustly to represent or misrepresent the world. If that thought could be sustained, it would follow that our lack of grounds – in any sense involving cognitive achievement – for such propo-

sitions would not have to compromise our right to accept them and work within the framework of the norms of evidence which they constitute.

My lecture reviewed various principles whereby the claim of the non-factuality of type III propositions might be motivated. But I have never felt entirely comfortable with the general approach which they illustrated.<sup>26</sup> That approach presupposes a connection between a proposition's having a genuinely representational content and the status of 'stand-offs' – intractable disputes centred on that proposition. If a type III proposition is beyond all evidence, for and against, that indeed ensures a stand-off between one who accepts it and one who denies it. But before that consideration can license the intended anti-factualist conclusion, it is necessary to show that the factuality of the type of proposition in question would imply that disagreements, real or imagined, about it should be in principle resolvable. In short: intransigent disagreement is an indicator of 'no fact of the matter' only where we are entitled to suppose that *were* there a fact of the matter, it would be detectable – would show up in the pattern of available evidence. That supposition has some plausibility in many of the cases – matters of taste, or comedy, for instance – where the possibility of intransigent disagreement has been taken by philosophers as an indication that the discourses in question do indeed not deal in genuinely factual matters. What sense can we attach to the idea of something's really being funny, for instance, if there is nothing to choose between the opinion of one who agrees and one who doesn't? But we precisely do not have *that* intuitive response to the present range of cases, and for a simple reason: it is only by virtue of their extreme generality that type III propositions differ from others – the corresponding type II propositions – which we *do* want to regard as factual. How could there be real facts about the winners of the FA Cup in the 1930s but no real fact that the world did not come into being five seconds ago replete with apparent traces of a much more extended past?

I do not hereby mean to disclaim any theoretical merit for my former proposal – which, in fairness to it, was actually presented as a potential *revision* of our ideas about factuality – but only to acknowledge its unattractiveness at the intuitive level. We do intuitively regard disputes about, say, comedy and certain kinds of value as answerable to no real 'fact of the matter', and of the point as being connected with the possibility of their being rationally unadjudicable in particular cases. But we don't think of type III propositions as answerable to no 'fact of the matter' in the same kind of way. If the groundlessness of a certain type of belief, as evidenced by the possibility of rationally intractable disagreement about it, always provided reason for regarding it as non-factual, sceptical argument should intuitively impress us as no more disturbing than a corresponding scepticism about taste or comedy. But that is not our typical reaction at all. The essence of any internalist response to I-II-III scepticism must be to maintain that there is no good sense in the idea that our acceptance of the type III propositions which we do accept could be *mistaken*. Whatever strong theoretical grounds might be

given for that claim, the very capacity of scepticism to disturb shows that it is not our intuitive view.

In sum, internalism is a great metaphysical issue. Still, great as it may be, it is notoriously unclear and stubbornly difficult to resolve. And while thinking of linguistic practice in a broadly later-Wittgensteinian way may make at least some forms of sceptical doubt hard to hear, the fact remains that we – many of us – seem to ourselves to hear them quite clearly. That makes it intellectually unsatisfying just to point out that the ultimate intelligibility of sceptical doubt is hostage to deep and unresolved issues in the theory of meaning. Rather, what we should ideally like – as an insurance, if you will – would be a rebuttal of – or at least a ‘liveable’ accommodation with – sceptical doubt which avoids joining the debate at that deep theoretical level, leaving the intelligibility of scepticism unchallenged. If we are approaching the issues in this spirit, we will not be tempted to make much of the idea that at least some of the propositions targeted by scepticism really lie *hors de combat*, functioning innocently as rules for the appraisal of evidence or – for whatever other reason – incapable of intelligible mismatch with the world.

## 5 Towards an entitlement

So: what is the worst-case scenario, as it were? Can there be an *intuitive* accommodation with scepticism – one which raises no doubt about the intelligibility of the sceptical challenge? If type III propositions are to be regarded as no less descriptive or contingent than the type II propositions which entail them, is there some relatively benign ‘spin’ or cast to be given to the situation to which an otherwise unchallenged I-II-III argument would call attention? I shall suggest that there is – a quite different kind of response prefigured by one tendency in Wittgenstein’s remarks. I conclude by giving the briefest indication of it.

The passages I have in mind are typified by the following:

... We check the story of Napoleon, but not whether all the reports about him are based on sense-deception, forgery and the like. For whenever we test anything, we are already presupposing something that is not tested. Now am I to say that the experiment which perhaps I make in order to test the truth of a proposition presupposes the truth of the proposition that the apparatus I believe I see is really there (and the like)?

(OC 163)

Compare:

One cannot make experiments if there are not some things that one does not doubt. But that does not mean that one takes certain

presuppositions on trust. When I write a letter and post it, I take it for granted that it will arrive – I expect this.

If I make an experiment I do not doubt the existence of the apparatus before my eyes. I have plenty of doubts, but not that. If I do a calculation I believe, without any doubts, that the figures on the paper aren't switching of their own accord, and I also trust my memory the whole time, and trust it without reservation.

(OC 337)

The thought in these passages has a connection with the issues about transmission of warrant across entailment reviewed earlier. We noted that warrant does not transmit from a premise to a validly inferred conclusion if it consists in defeasible evidence for the premise whose force depends on having the conclusion as collateral information. That is an instance of something simpler and more general: that one cannot transmit a warrant to a validly inferred conclusion in cases where the very possession of the warrant for the premises in the first place depends on a prior warrant for the conclusion. This more general idea extends to cases where the warrant for the premises is non-inferential. To take it that one has a warrant for a particular proposition not by (defeasible) inference from other warranted propositions but directly, by the appropriate exercise of certain appropriate cognitive capacities – perception, introspection, memory or intellection, for instance, – always involves various kinds of presupposition. These presuppositions will include the proper functioning of the relevant capacities, the suitability of the occasion and circumstances for their effective function, and indeed the integrity of the very concepts involved in the formulation of the proposition in question. Because they are needed to underwrite the validity of any warrant one acquires, the general constraint just stated places (specific forms of) such presuppositions beyond the range of what may be confirmed by inference from the proposition that one takes oneself to have warranted.

Now the crucial point made in the quoted passages is that one cannot but take certain such things for granted. By that I don't mean that one could not investigate (at least some of) the presuppositions involved in a particular case. But in proceeding to such an investigation, one would then be forced to make further presuppositions of the same general kinds. The general source of the limitations on warrant transmission in these cases is thus a consideration about the essential limitations of any particular cognitive achievement: wherever I achieve warrant for a proposition, I do so courtesy of specific presuppositions – about my own powers, and the prevailing circumstances, and my understanding of the issues involved – for which I will have no specific, earned warrant. This is a necessary truth. I may, in any particular case, set about earning such a warrant in turn – and *that* investigation may go badly, defeating the presuppositions that I originally made. But whether it does or doesn't go badly, it will have its own so far unfounded – *unbegriindet* (OC

253) – presuppositions. Again: whenever cognitive achievement takes place, it does so in a context of *specific* presuppositions which are not themselves an expression of any cognitive achievement to date.

These propositions are not just one more kind of ‘hinge’ as we have understood that term. Hinges, so far, are standing certainties, exportable from context to context (subject perhaps to certain restrictions on the receiving context). Whereas, the present range of cases are particular to the investigative occasion: they are propositions such as that my eyes are functioning properly *now*, that the things that I am *currently* perceiving have not been extensively disguised so as to conceal their true nature, etc. My confidence in the things which I take myself to have verified in a particular context can rationally be no stronger than my confidence in these context-specific claims. Because of their context-specificity, they are not propositions whose rejection would involve epistemic catastrophe (though generalisations of which they are instances can be expected to have that feature). Our certainty in them as a genre shows in the unhesitant way we set about routine empirical investigation of the world and our ready acceptance of its results.

While these context-specific propositions are thus set apart from the three kinds of hinge already noted, two points of analogy with type III propositions are nevertheless striking. First, both kinds of proposition articulate something a thinker must inevitably take for granted if she is to credit herself with the achievement of any warrants at all of a certain kind, the type III propositions conditioning the acquisition of defeasible inferential warrants while the context-specifics engage both the inferential and the non-inferential case. Second, presuppositions of each kind will unavoidably lack earned warrant at the point at which they need to be made. That much analogy is enough to conjure a scepticism about non-inferential warrant entirely parallel in spirit to I-II-III scepticism. Suppose I set myself to count the books on one of the shelves in my office and arrive at the answer, twenty-six. The sceptical thought will say that the warrant thereby acquired for that answer can rationally be regarded as no stronger than the grounds I have for confidence that I counted correctly, that my senses and memory were accordingly functioning properly, that the books themselves were stable during the count and were not spontaneously popping into and out of existence unnoticed by me, etc. Yet I will have done nothing – we may suppose – to justify my confidence in these specific presuppositions. So how have I achieved any genuine warrant at all?

Here is the line of reply on which I want to focus. Since there is *no such thing as* a process of warrant acquisition for each of whose specific presuppositions warrant has already been earned, it should not be reckoned to be part of the ordinary concept of an acquired warrant that it somehow aspire to this – incoherent – ideal. Rather, we should view each and every cognitive project as irreducibly involving elements of adventure – I *take a risk* on the reliability of my senses, the amenability of the circumstances, etc., much as I take a

risk on the continuing reliability of the steering, and the stability of the road surface every time I ride my bicycle. For as soon as I grant that I ought ideally to check the presuppositions of a project, even in a context in which there is no particular reason for concern about them, then I should agree *pari passu* that I ought in turn to check the presuppositions of the check – which is one more project after all – and so on, indefinitely. So then there will be no principled stopping point to the process of checking and the original project will never get started. The right conclusion – the reply will continue – is not that the acquisition of genuine warrant is impossible, but rather that since warrant is acquired whenever investigation is undertaken in an *epistemically responsible* manner, epistemic responsibility cannot, *per impossible*, involve an investigation of every presupposition whose falsity would defeat the claim to have acquired a warrant. The correct principle is not that any acquired warrant is no stronger than one's independently acquired reasons to accept its presuppositions. It is, rather, that it is no stronger than the warrant for any of the presuppositions about which there is some *specific reason* to entertain a misgiving.

This line of reply has several attractions. It involves, first, no large contention in the metaphysics of meaning, nor any unintuitive claim about factuality. It is not open, second, to the complaint one wants to level against so-called 'naturalistic' responses to scepticism, after the style of Hume and Strawson,<sup>27</sup> that – in emphasising that it is part of our (human) nature to form beliefs inductively, to see each other as 'minded', and so on – it offers a mere *excuse* for our inclination to form beliefs in a fashion which, for all that has been said, falls short of the ideals of our reason. And third, it concedes that the best sceptical arguments have something to teach us – that the limits of justification they bring out are genuine and essential – but then replies that, just for that reason, cognitive achievement must be reckoned to take place *within such limits*. To attempt to surpass them would result not in an increase in rigour or solidity but merely in cognitive paralysis.

The term 'entitlement' has recently come into vogue in epistemology to characterise – perhaps wishfully – a range of propositions which, although unable to make a compelling case on their behalf, a thinker can nevertheless somehow justifiably presuppose or make use of as part of the framework of other investigations. Usually, the idea has been intended in a way that presupposes a kind of division of epistemic labour: an ordinary thinker is entitled to beliefs which experts – local specialists, or even philosophers – can justify, even if she has absolutely no inkling of – indeed, perhaps could not understand – that justification if it were presented to her. However, a somewhat different version of the idea emerges from the foregoing. First (to tidy up our so far somewhat free-wheeling use of the term) let us say that P is a *presupposition* of a particular cognitive enquiry if to doubt P would be a commitment to doubting the significance or competence of the enquiry. Then one kind of *entitlement* may be defined as a presupposition meeting

the following two conditions: (i) there is no extant evidence against P and (ii) someone pursuing the relevant enquiry who accepted that there is nevertheless an onus to justify P would implicitly undertake a commitment to an infinite regress of justificatory projects, each concerned to vindicate the presuppositions of its predecessor.

That would stand refinement, but the general *motif* is clear enough. If a project (epistemic or otherwise) is sufficiently valuable to us – in particular, if its failure would at least be no worse than the costs of not executing it, and its success would be better – and if the attempt to vindicate its presuppositions would raise presuppositions of its own of no more secure an antecedent status, then we are entitled to – may help ourselves to – the original presuppositions without specific evidence.

This proposal does not transfer directly into a response to I-II-III scepticism. Type III propositions are not entitlements as characterised, since they fail to meet condition (ii). The problem with type III propositions is not that – like ‘my visual system is functioning properly on this occasion’ – to accept that there is an onus to justify them in any particular context in which they are presuppositional would be to accept an infinite regress of similar justificatory obligations, but rather that, failing some independent response to the I-II-III argument, one has no idea how to justify them at all. Nevertheless, the spirit of the foregoing ideas might foreseeably be extended to cover these special commitments. As noted, type III propositions are implicitly in play whenever our best justification for the truth of propositions of one kind – propositions of one distinctive type of subject matter – consists of the assembly of information about something else. That is the architecture which I-II-III scepticism attempts to impose, with varying degrees of plausibility, on the justification of propositions about the material world, about the past and about other minds, and on inductive justification. And wherever such is indeed the justificational architecture, it will be plausible that a type III proposition – actually, a strengthened form of those illustrated earlier – will form part of the informational setting we presuppose in order for the relevant transitions to rank as justified. Very abstractly: suppose it is granted that the best justification we can have for a certain kind of proposition – P-propositions – consists in information of another kind – Q-propositions – such that no finite set of Q-propositions entails any P-proposition. The use of P-propositions in accordance with this conception will then carry a double commitment: a commitment to there being true P-propositions – and hence truth-makers for them – at all, and a commitment to a reliable connection between the obtaining of such truth-makers and the truth of finite batches of appropriate Q-propositions. That is the broad shape of the commitment which surfaces in the specific instances:

that there is a material world, broadly in keeping with the way in which sense experience represents it;

that other people have minds, whose states are broadly in keeping with the way they behave;  
 that the world has an ancient history, broadly in keeping with presently available traces and apparent memories;  
 that there are laws of nature, broadly manifest in finitely observable regularities.

Here, each first conjunct presents a type III proposition as originally conceived, while the second conjunct effects the connection necessary for the favoured kind of evidence to have the force which we customarily attach to it. As earlier observed, we may of course avoid local versions of the I-II-III argument by arguing for a rejection of the justificational architecture which it presupposes – with perceptual claims, perhaps, a prime case for that attempt. But if this is to be a *globally* successful tactic, then we will have to do nothing less than so fashion our thinking that it *nowhere* traffics in propositions related as the P-propositions and Q-propositions in the schema. And that is just to say that *none* of the thoughts we think must be such that their truth-makers are beyond our direct cognition, so that we are forced to rely on finite and accessible putative *indicators* of their obtaining.

The prime casualty of such a way of thinking would be the thinker's conception of her own cognitive *locality*: the idea of a range of states of affairs and events existing beyond the bounds of her own direct awareness. Globally, to avoid the justificational architecture presupposed by I-II-III scepticism would be to forgo all conception of oneself as having position in a world extending, perhaps infinitely, beyond one's cognitive horizon. In particular, it would be to surrender all conception of our own specific situation within a broader objective world extending *spatially and temporally* beyond us.

It is a crucial question whether there could be any coherent system of thought which both practised exclusively within such limits and provided no resources for a grasp of its own limitations. All our actual thought and activity is organised under the aegis of a distinction between states of affairs accessible to us at our own cognitive station and others that lie beyond. There are issues, certainly, about what is properly allotted to the respective sides of this distinction – whether, for example, the former encompasses anything beyond our own episodic mental states, as Descartes implicitly thought. But whatever is allotted to the domain of the directly accessible, there are two vitally important categories of fact – those of general natural law and of the past – which must surely be consigned to what lies beyond. Since practical reasoning involves bringing information of both kinds to bear on hypothetical situations – of course this point requires detail which I will not here attempt to provide – it seems certain that any system of thought purified of all liability to I-II-III scepticism could not be that of a rational agent. One's life

as a practical reasoner depends upon type III presuppositions. To avoid them is to avoid having a life.

All this, naturally, needs further elaboration. In particular, the notion of entitlement needs a proper generalisation, to cover the case of type III propositions, and there is an issue to address about whether there is any such generalisation which affords everything we want without the cost of being – as many would think – implausibly permissive (netting, for instance, the existence of God along with that of an extended past and the external world) or implausibly relativistic (leaving, for instance, nothing to choose between a normal acceptance of the existence of other minds and solipsism). Those are questions for another occasion.

But let me conclude by summarising the provisional perspective reached by *this* discussion. I suggest that the principal message of *On Certainty* is that scepticism embodies an insight which Moore missed: the insight that to be a rational agent pursuing any form of cognitive enquiry – whether within or outside one's own epistemic locality – means making presuppositions which – at least on the occasion – are not themselves the fruits of such enquiry and are therefore not known. When I go after warranted belief about accessible states of affairs in my own locality, the credibility of my results depends on presuppositions about my own proper functioning, and the suitability of the prevailing conditions, etc. When I go after warranted belief about states of affairs outside, the credibility of my results depends on presupposition of the augmented type III propositions which condition my conception of how the locally accessible may provide indications of what lies beyond. The official sceptical response to this reflection would be to give up on the distinction between warranted and unwarranted belief as a charade. The alternative 'spin' to be taken from *On Certainty* is that the concept of warranted belief only gets substance within a framework in which it is recognised that all rational thought and agency involves ineliminable elements of cognitive risk. Since rational agency is not an optional aspect of our lives, we are entitled – save when there is specific evidence to the contrary – to make the presuppositions that need to be made in living out our conception of the kind of world we inhabit and the kinds of cognitive powers we possess.

To be entitled to accept a proposition in this way, of course, has no connection whatever with the likelihood of its truth. We are entitled to proceed on the basis of certain beliefs merely because there is no extant reason to disbelieve them and because, unless we make some such commitments, we cannot proceed at all. Any epistemological standpoint which falls back on a conception of entitlement of this kind for the last word against scepticism needs its own version of (what is sometimes called) the Serenity Prayer:<sup>28</sup> in ordinary enquiry, we must hope to be granted the discipline to take responsibility for what we can be responsible, the trust to accept what we must merely presuppose, and the wisdom to know the difference.<sup>29</sup>

## Notes

- 1 Both papers are reprinted in Moore 1993. Page references to them are to that volume.
- 2 The editors of *On Certainty* say: 'goaded'.
- 3 See Moore 1939: 166.
- 4 But read on!
- 5 See Moore's 'Some Judgements of Perception', originally published in the *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 1918–1919 and reprinted in Moore 1922. A relevant passage (about Moore's finger) comes at p. 228.
- 6 See Wright 2000, 2002 and 2003. See also Davies 1998, 2000 and 2003.
- 7 Notice, by the way, that in all these cases there is no example of failure of *closure*: in all the scenarios, if one has *a warrant* for P, then one has *a warrant* for I. The distinction between transmission and closure has been largely missed in the literature, and confusion of it has motivated some unjustified reservations about the latter, weaker principle. For instance, such confusion is at work, I believe, in some of the key examples in Fred Dretske's classic 'Epistemic Operators' (Dretske 1970).
- 8 The disjunctivist idea seems original, at least in modern literature, to J.M. Hinton. See Hinton 1973 and the various earlier articles of his to which he there refers. It is further developed in Snowdon 1981 and deployed against what he terms the 'highest common factor' conception of experience in McDowell's 'Criteria, Defeasibility and Knowledge' (reprinted in McDowell 1998b). See also McDowell 1994 Ch. VI, part 3.
- 9 In fact, he is begging the question in any case. See Wright 2002.
- 10 An interesting recent attempt in this direction is Pryor 2000.
- 11 The rub, though, is in 'made good'. It is not enough just to *propose* one of these lines of resistance – that is, to rest content with the claim that the opposed sceptical perspective has not been proved and is therefore 'not compulsory' (McDowell 1994: 113; 1998b: 385). Let that be so. Still, merely to oppose one non-compulsory conception with another is to leave open the possibility that, for all we know, the Sceptic's view of the justificational architecture is right. And a position where, for all I know, I have no warrant for any claims about the material world, or other minds, etc., is hardly more comfortable than one in which I have apparently been shown that I have no such warrant.
- 12 Notwithstanding McDowell's sympathetic and resourceful handling of the idea in 'Criteria, Defeasibility and Knowledge'.
- 13 Actually, as Michael Williams has pointed out to me, the four parts of the text display something of a thematic division: the first and second parts, comprising respectively §§1–65 and §§66–192, are naturally read as mainly centred on Moore's 'Proof', while the rest of the book – §§193–299 and 300–676 – is primarily reaction to the 'Defense'.
- 14 See OC 95, quoted above.
- 15 Since the Duhem–Quine thesis concerns the bearing of *disconfirming* evidence, it is not to be directly equated with the thesis of the information-dependence of empirical confirmation. However, they are obviously closely related. I won't attempt to explore the details of the relationship here.
- 16 See also OC 87–8.
- 17 See RFM I, 118.
- 18 See McFetridge 1990: 150–4.
- 19 See RFM I, 156 for a typical passage. The attempt to understand this attitude of Wittgenstein's was a central preoccupation of Wright 1980.
- 20 He had allowed in *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics* that the contrast was

not a sharp one – that it ‘shades off in all directions’ (VII, 6) – but the idea of propositions’ ‘crossing the house’, as it were, seems to be new to *On Certainty*.

21 Here is how the thought continues:

Do I know or do I only believe that I am called L.W.? – Of course, if the question were ‘Am I certain or do I only surmise. . .?’, then my answer could be relied on.

Do I know or do I only believe. . .?’ might also be expressed like this: what if it *seemed* to turn out that what until now has seemed immune to doubt was a false assumption? Would I react as I do when a belief has proved to be false? or would it seem to knock from under my feet the ground on which I stand in making any judgement at all? – But of course I do not intend this as a *prophecy*.

Would I simply say ‘I should never have thought it’ – or would I (have to) refuse to revise my judgement – because such a ‘revision’ would amount to an annihilation of all yardsticks?

(OC 491–2)

22 Strictly speaking, one would need to refashion the choice of *e* to avoid an independent entailment of *I*.

23 To construct a I–II–III argument around this example, take I as ‘this table weighs 50 kilograms’; II as ‘this table weighs 50 kilograms when no-one is paying attention to it’; III as ‘this table exists when no-one is paying attention to it’.

24 In some passages, Wittgenstein certainly appears to have such an approach in mind. See, for example, OC 494–6.

25 See, for example, OC 197–9 and 214–15.

26 In effect, that approach is one of trying to make a case that type III propositions fail to exhibit what I later called Cognitive Command (in Wright 1992).

27 See Strawson 1985 Ch. 1.

28 I had thought the prayer, or at least its sentiment, original to Augustine, but John Haldane advises me that it is modern, now usually attributed to a Dr Reinhold Niebuhr, of the Union Theological Seminary, New York City, who reputedly composed it in 1932. The official version runs:

God, grant me  
the Serenity to accept the things I cannot change  
the Courage to change the things I can  
and the Wisdom to know the difference.

29 My thanks for comments and criticisms to participants at the 2001 Rutgers Epistemology Conference and the conference on *Wittgenstein’s Lasting Significance* held at Gregynog, mid-Wales, in July 2001, where parts of this material were presented.

## SCEPTICISM AND PRAGMATISM

*Akeel Bilgrami*

This chapter will look sympathetically but not uncritically at Moorean responses to certain versions of epistemological scepticism about the external world, with a view to making them over into a more recognisably pragmatist response to such scepticism. Pragmatism – to some extent justifiably – has often been dismissed for not taking scepticism seriously enough and for not being respectful enough of traditional epistemological problems and the long history of scrupulous responses to such problems in the epistemological tradition. By arriving at pragmatist epistemological ideas via a consideration and transformation of a traditional and highly scrupulous response to traditional Cartesian scepticism, I want to correct this failing in pragmatist epistemology.

Section I expounds and analyses a Moorean response to Cartesian scepticism. Section II builds up a general pragmatist response to scepticism from a specific element in the Moorean response. Section III explores the relations between such a pragmatism and Wittgensteinian responses to scepticism.

### I

G.E. Moore famously responded to a certain understanding of Cartesian scepticism by offering a given belief, held under given circumstances, which was immune to Cartesian doubt, and which could be counted as true and as a bit of knowledge. I will not directly take up Moore’s response to this version of scepticism about the external world. I will look very briefly instead at a much more recent elaboration of what is essentially Moore’s strategy of response, by James Pryor (Pryor 2000).

Pryor focuses on that aspect of Moore’s response which says that I can know some proposition without being able to prove it. A concession to fallibilism is therefore built into the response. Moore, as is well known, himself offers an example of such a proposition, held or uttered under certain circumstances – ‘Here is a hand’ uttered when one (supposes that one) holds up one’s hand in bright daylight and with one’s visual and mental capacities functioning normally. Pryor’s key claim on behalf of Moore is that for propositions such

as this, it is natural and intuitive that having an experience as of there being a hand justifies one's believing that there is a hand. Here is the gist of why he thinks that a claim such as this is a plausible response to give to what he thinks is the best argument provided by the Cartesian sceptic.

What is that sceptical argument? I will have to be very summary and brief in stating it and stating Pryor's response. It is a familiar point that the Cartesian sceptic lays down the challenge that before we can count some proposition or belief (some indexically formulated belief content such as 'Here is a hand') as a bit of perceptual knowledge about the external world, we have to establish that we know something else – that we are not in a state of generalised deception or hallucination while believing it (and Descartes himself imagines scenarios of dreaming or of being subject to deception at the hands of an evil demon in order to spell out what he means by that state of deception). We have to know this latter thing prior (in some conceptual not chronological sense) to knowing anything of the sort we claim to know when we claim to know that there is a hand, i.e. it has to be conceptually prior and independent to knowing anything on the basis of perception. So to put the challenge most generally, with the specific case in parenthesis, suppose that I have some grounds (perceptual grounds, grounds appealing to perceptual experience) for claiming to know  $p$  (some indexically formulated belief content such as 'Here is a hand'). And suppose that there is some other condition (the generalised deceptive state under one scenario or another) which is incompatible with the truth of  $p$ , and which is described by the proposition  $q$ . Now, if  $q$  describes the kind of condition which could obtain while I *still possess those grounds*, we are in a position to have to face the challenge that the sceptic poses. The challenge is: to have knowledge of  $p$ , we must know  $q$  to be false antecedently to knowing  $p$  *on those grounds*.

Pryor characterises this challenge not just for knowledge but even for justification, and points out that the challenge is hardest when so conceived. Thus, it gets reformulated as: If one is ever to have a justification for believing  $p$  on certain grounds and those grounds are still possessed when  $q$  obtains, one must have an antecedent justification for believing  $q$  to be false.

The sceptic claims that the challenge, so formulated, is unanswerable. This is because to be justified in believing that  $q$  is false, i.e. to be justified in particular in believing that you are not in one of the Cartesian scenarios involving generalised deception, you have to antecedently have justification for believing some things on the basis of the grounds in question, i.e. you have to antecedently have justification for believing some things on the basis of perceptual experience.

Pryor responds to this argument along lines that appeal to one strand in Moore's writings. He calls it 'dogmatism'. Dogmatism questions the demand of the sceptic (as it is specifically laid out in the foregoing exposition) that one must have antecedent justification for believing  $q$  to be false if one is to have knowledge of  $p$  on the basis of perceptual experiences. He says that

there is a case to be made for saying that in certain cases (the Moorean example of the hand is one such case) when you have an experience as of p's being the case, you have an *immediate prima facie justification* for believing that p. The notion of 'immediate' and the qualification 'prima facie' are both important here.

Such justification is to be distinguished from mediate justification. Unlike mediate justification, immediate justification of a proposition does not derive from a justification one has for believing any further proposition. If I look at an instrument (a thermometer, say, or a gas gauge) and see that it has a certain reading (104, say, or E) and come to form a belief (that my daughter's temperature is high, say, or that my car is out of gas), that belief is only meditately justified by my perceptual experience of the instrument's reading. Even if this belief is formed very rapidly, that is even if it is psychologically immediate, it is nevertheless meditately justified, justification being an epistemological not a psychological notion.

As for the qualification that the immediate justification is *prima facie*, the point is that it can be defeated by additional evidence, but *in the absence of such evidence*, the belief just simply *is* justified.

I am giving the bare skeleton of this response. Pryor makes a number of useful qualifications and distinctions about both 'immediate' and 'prima facie' to distance himself from others making similar responses to his, but I need not describe all that here, since I have only chosen his response as representative of a certain kind of Moorean response.

The response confronts as uncompulsory a certain demand of the sceptic, which I sketched above. It does so by saying we *do* have grounds (certain experiences of ours) which *immediately* and *prima facie* justify any given belief in a certain class of beliefs about the external world. And, the point of the justification being immediate is that this happens without me in any way having to antecedently justify the belief in the falsity of other propositions whose truth would be incompatible with the truth of the given belief about the external world, but which, if true, would leave intact our grounds for the given belief about the external world. This confrontation with the sceptic is completely effective and would quite repudiate the sceptic, so long as it is the case that there *is* this sort of immediate justification provided by our experiences for beliefs about the external world. I repeat: if we have an immediate justification of this sort for a belief about the external world, then 'dogmatism' has carried the day, because the whole point of immediate justification is that it does not rely on the sort of antecedent justification that the offending demand in the sceptic's argument requires. It does not rely on it because nothing like that is needed.

Notice that like many other recent responses to scepticism, this response does not try and refute the sceptic outright but proceeds by frankly rejecting a premise of the sceptic. (But, unlike many other philosophers such as Putnam and Davidson, and Wittgenstein before them, who have rejected the

sceptic by rejecting his philosophy of mind and language and presenting alternative philosophies of mind and language, this response simply confronts the sceptic with an alternative *epistemological* picture, which it claims has real merits on its side.<sup>1</sup>) The premise of the sceptic it rejects is the one which makes the offending demand. And it claims to reject it on the grounds that a notion of justification exists for a certain class of statements which can intuitively bypass that demand. This is the notion of immediate justification.

There are bound to be objections to the notion of 'immediate' justification. The idea requires that the justification of some perceptual belief or proposition does not depend on the justification of others, so there is bound to be scepticism about whether there are such propositions, and there is bound to be a question as to whether all justification is not mediate. Pryor considers a couple of different versions of these objections, and gives sensible, plausible replies. He points out that one does not have to deny that there is always background knowledge (or background justified beliefs) needed to justify any perceptual proposition or belief (in the foreground). He rightly insists, though, that this does not mean that all perceptual beliefs or propositions (such as the Moorean one about the hand) therefore collapse into the kind of case mentioned above of coming to justify that my daughter has a high fever or that one's car is out of gas on the basis of justifying that an instrument has a certain reading. Thus, for instance, I may have to have the background justified belief that my senses are working well to come to have the kind of immediate justification for some perceptual belief such as that there is a hand, but the justification for the former belief does not serve in the same way as the *basis* (as a premise as it were) for the justification of the latter, in the way that my justification for the belief that an instrument has a certain reading is the basis for my justification for the belief that my car is out of gas. The Moorean belief about the hand is, to use Pryor's term, 'perceptually minimal', in the way that my belief about the car being out of gas (when it is based on a meter reading) is not. The relation between background beliefs and a minimally perceptual belief that *p* which is justified by our experience as of *p*, is quite different from the relation between the belief that an instrument reads *E* and the belief that I am out of gas. The latter pair of beliefs raises the question of mediate justification. The former do not. Immediate justification cannot therefore be collapsed with mediate. To the extent that I find Pryor's Moorean argument convincing (and I do find it convincing in an interim way, as a stepping-stone to the right epistemology), I think he is quite right to insist on the idea of perceptually minimal beliefs. There is a long tradition that Pryor is tapping here, going back to well before Moore, and in recent years John McDowell has built up a very interesting set of epistemological claims not just about such things as hands in the middle-size environment, but about values, and about others' meanings and mental states, as all being 'perceptually minimal' in this sense. Though there is bound to be some residual scepticism about this claim, I am not given any

pause by it, at least for the purposes I have in mind, for the brief remaining part of this chapter.

I want to focus now not on the claim that justification can be, in this sense, ‘immediate’, but on the other qualifier, that it is ‘*prima facie*’. It is vital for the Moorean argument presented here that minimally perceptual beliefs’ immediate justifications do not repudiate the sceptic’s demanding premise by claiming that these justifications are non-defeasible. It would be implausible if they did that, since it would fly in the face of occasional facts, facts about illusion and deception. The point is that there is no need to make the stronger implausible claim, as even if the justifications are *prima facie*, they would still be effective against the offending premise of the sceptic, so long as they were immediate.

The offending premise is that we must have a justification for not-*q* (i.e. for the falsity of the proposition describing the systematic deception scenario, the scenario which is incompatible with the truth of the perceptually minimal proposition *p*), if *p* is to be justified on any grounds (such as our experience as of *p*) that would still exist if *q* were true. The premise makes a demand. And the claim is that so long as the demand is not met, the sceptical *hypothesis* that *q* might be true (that we might be in a scenario such as that of being in a dream or other form of deception) will rule out any claims to having justified *p*. Immediate justification repudiates the demand that the sceptical hypothesis has to be antecedently shown to be false in order to justify *p*, and the point is that *even if the justification is prima facie, the repudiation is effective*. Here is what Pryor says about this:

I don’t want to claim that you *never* have to rule out sceptical hypotheses. I claim merely that your experiences give you *prima facie* justification for your perceptual beliefs, and that it’s not a precondition of having this *prima facie* justification that you are able to rule out any sceptical hypotheses. This *prima facie* justification can be undermined or threatened if you gain positive empirical evidence that *you really are in a sceptical scenario*. . . . If you acquire evidence of that sort, then you’d have to find some non-question begging way of ruling the sceptical hypothesis out, before you’d be *all things considered justified* in believing that things are as your experiences present them. In the standard case, though, when the *prima facie* justification you get from your experiences is not defeated or undermined, then it counts as all things considered justification, without your having to do this.

(Pryor 2000: 537–8)

One of the effects of ‘*prima facie*’ as a qualifier of the immediate justification is that it allows for the fact that we may *sometimes* have to rule out the fact of deception, if we are to have a justification for even a perceptually minimal belief. And so a key question arises, *when* are those times? What

general thing can we say about all those times? They are, apparently, times when we have positive empirical evidence that we are being deceived. The idea is familiar and old. There is a default or positive presumption in perceptually minimal propositions such as  $p$  being justified whenever one has the experience as of  $p$ , and one needs (counter) positive empirical evidence of deception before the presumption of justification is cancelled. If the positive empirical evidence of deception exists, then we do have to go about investigating whether the evidence does in fact justify believing we are being deceived. If the investigation yields the verdict that we are deceived, then, there is no justification for the minimally perceptual belief on the basis of the experience, and if the investigation yields the verdict that we are after all not being deceived, we would have justification for the belief, only in this case it would not have been immediately justified.

As I said, any Moorean response, which avowedly begs the question against the sceptic by rejecting one of his key demands, has to put in all these qualifications, in order to carry conviction.

## II

But these qualifications conceal a perfectly general moral that Pryor does not notice. That the ‘*prima facie*’ qualifier for the idea of immediate justification presupposes a certain kind of positive presumption which will *only* be overturned if there is (counter) positive empirical evidence for deception, is an entirely salutary thing. It is precisely what is needed to have it both ways, as Moore and Pryor want to have it when they want a *fallibilist* answer to the sceptic. It shows *at once* that the sceptic can be repudiated and that he can be repudiated without giving up on fallibility. It is only the positive presumption idea which makes this twin achievement possible. Fallibility is what the sceptic always exploited and now we have the idea which blocks him from doing so. And it allows us to do so, not by implausibly denying fallibility but by blocking the move from fallibility to scepticism.

What I want to propose, and what escapes Pryor, is that this salutary claim of a positive presumption is *detachable* from the Moorean setting. By the ‘Moorean setting’, I mean the particular response Pryor’s Moore gives to this version of Cartesian scepticism about the external world. A defining feature of his response is that it makes a distinction *at the outset* between experiences and the (minimally) perceptual beliefs which need to be justified on the basis of those experiences. So a certain role in epistemology is given right *at the outset* to justification, which goes from experiences to a certain class of beliefs. The qualifier to such justification presupposes that the justification has a positive presumption. But the good idea of such a positive presumption need not have any ties to this setting involving these distinctions which are defined into this response to the sceptic. Its wisdom is perfectly general.

What do I mean by ‘general’? The subject of scepticism in the version we

are considering, is the subject of a certain kind of doubt applied to a certain class of propositions or beliefs about the external world. Descartes presented the doubt as one of going from one's experiences to this class of beliefs. The *target* of his method was to arrive at a certain doubt – the idea that perceptual *beliefs* did not amount to knowledge (or in some readings of the nature of the doubt, they fell short of even being justified). But *his way of pursuing* this target doubt was to set up problems for a certain transition, from one's *experiences* to these beliefs. That he should have set things up this way, is a product of a very specific procedure of his, which I will not, for reasons of space, elaborate here. The crucial point is that, procedure and path of pursuit aside, the doubt itself, the sceptical conclusion, is really only about a class of *beliefs* which he claimed fell short of knowledge and of being justified. Pryor and Moore respond to such doubt, and I have said that there are genuinely attractive and plausible elements to this response. But their response accepts without question the dialectical set up in Descartes, the defining distinction of the doubt, as one about the justification of a transition from one's experiences to one's perceptual beliefs. An essential presupposition of the details of their response, as we have just seen, is that there is a default or *positive presumption* that that transition (the very one put into question by Descartes) can justifiably be made. What I am proposing now is that if we shed the dialectical setting, if we refuse to make from the outset a distinction between experiences and perceptual beliefs, and look instead at the target of the doubt, the perceptual beliefs themselves, we can correspondingly transform the good idea of a positive presumption so as to provide some liberating possibilities for an anti-Cartesian epistemology, possibilities which are quite unavailable to Pryor, given the setting within which he responds.

Detached from its Moorean setting, the generality of the positive presumption can be expressed as: there is a positive presumption that our perceptual beliefs are true unless there is (positive) counter-empirical evidence against them. Notice that *this does not make any mention of experiences*. Notice also that I do *not* say that they are justified, but that they are true. To say that they are justified is to invite the question as to what the basis is for their justification, the question from what premises are they justified, and that would land us back to the Cartesian setting of experiences which provide the basis for their (immediate) justification. The claim being made is a radical one. Detaching the point of the sound principle of positive presumption from its Moorean setting leads all the way up to the radical pragmatist idea that that a certain class of our beliefs are true (and amount to knowledge) without any need to justify them at all, since, without positive evidence to the contrary which might raise certain specific doubts about them, there is no need to worry about justifying them.

Pryor, I am claiming, at least implicitly makes a commitment to something very general which need make no mention of experiences, a commitment to the principle that we need positive empirical evidence to the contrary before

we give up on something in the name of *doubt*. The general lesson to be learnt from all the specific things he says about the transition from experiences to beliefs is that doubt is not something that hangs over us in the air, like a permanent contaminant of the air; it is something that arises when particular contamination is present (the counter and positive empirical evidence, which gives rise to it, as is made clear by the idea of positive presumption). This principle is not something that holds only of doubts formulated with a very specific working distinction in Descartes (experiences/perceptual beliefs), doubts about a certain kind of *transition* (from experiences to perceptual beliefs). It is a general piece of wisdom about doubt. If we *were* to accept the working distinction in Descartes that Pryor does, then I think we would be perfectly right to follow him in applying the principle, and come to his anti-Cartesian conclusions. But even if we did *not* accept the distinction, the principle holds just as surely. If someone simply said (without any mention of experiences) that your perceptual beliefs are dubitable, you could apply the principle and deny that they are so, unless there was positive empirical evidence that they are to be doubted. They are true unless there are reasons to doubt them. If that is so, if the principle really holds in this way, Descartes is just as surely repudiated as he is in the setting of Pryor's response.

All that needs to be done is to *elevate* the principle, which as we saw in our exposition is doing a great deal of work in Pryor's Moorean response, to another more general plane. The elevation does not cross any illegitimate boundaries. Whatever soundness the principle had in Pryor's setting carries over to the more general setting. To deny this is to deny that the principle is one generally about doubt, and to insist that it is particularly about doubt regarding a very specific transition. But that insistence would be completely arbitrary, a fetish, which would only reveal that we have become slaves to the details of the Cartesian picture, even when we are setting out to refute him. Why should we not pre-empt his conclusion, without trying to pre-empt every specific procedural path to that conclusion? It is, after all, the conclusion, *the scepticism about the external world*, which we are concerned to foil. In any case, there is no evidence in anything that Moore and Pryor actually say which suggests that they would restrict the use of that key principle of their argument to their very specific setting. It is true that they do not see its generality, but that is not because of a principled rejection of the generalisation of what they in fact do see, more because they are focusing on the details of the Cartesian framework within which they are working.

When I say that the principle need not be restricted to doubts formulated with a defining distinction in Descartes which invokes the notion of experiences, the point is not to deny that the notion of experiences is ever in play in perceptual epistemology. What I was careful to say when I first described the Moorean setting a few paragraphs ago, is that it introduces the notion of 'experiences' *right at the outset*. What is being claimed now is exactly that we do *not* have to introduce it then, we do not have to make a distinction

between perceptual beliefs and experiences at the outset. Suppose I adopted the principle not in the form that Pryor does, as a refusal to doubt that an experience of mine immediately justifies a perceptual belief unless there is positive empirical evidence of deception, but instead, as I am proposing, as a refusal to doubt a perceptual belief of mine, unless there is positive empirical evidence of deception. Hence, I will not doubt my perceptual beliefs that I have a hand, that I am sitting with a pad and a pen, that there is a window in front of me, that there are leafless trees outside, etc., unless someone gives me specific evidence of deception. So far no mention has been made of experiences. What is true is that if I were to be given such specific evidence then I may well have to introduce the notion of experiences to account for why I might have come to these erroneous perceptual beliefs – the distinction which is present in Pryor may therefore come in later, in this way, and only to pick up the slack, in accounting for perceptual error. But the point is that it is not there at the outset, defining the very form in which the doubt we are responding to is formulated. It need not therefore get built into the key principle about doubt invoked in the response itself. One might put the point by saying that the distinction is not *ex ante* built into the principle of positive presumption, the distinction enters only *ex post* to account for perceptual error, where it exists.

I have tried to tease out of a representative response to a form of Cartesian scepticism, a general principle about doubt. If this is right, then we can *reverse* the direction of insight and say that Pryor and Moore are in fact applying in a particular way a perfectly general principle, a principle which can be of a piece with an epistemological outlook that is familiar to us under the label ‘pragmatism’. In saying this, I do not want to underestimate the detailed ways in which this outlook is to be found in the more traditional responses to scepticism as are actually found in Moore, and Pryor’s elaboration of him. It is essential to my chapter that the outlook is not insulated from these traditional ways of doing epistemology. Here is an important detail of the outlook which is found in the tradition.

The generalisation I have made so far has been from a refusal to doubt that a certain transition from experience to perceptual belief can be made without positive evidence of deception, to a refusal to doubt perceptual beliefs without positive empirical evidence of deception. But, of course, *one can generalise further* by lifting the restriction to perceptual beliefs, and applying the principle to *all beliefs in enquiry*, or at any rate all the beliefs in our enquiry of which we are *certain* (as opposed to beliefs which we hold with some uncertainty, as, for instance, *hypotheses*). Thus, as a contemporary enquirer, I will refuse to doubt that the earth is not flat, unless someone actually produces specific positive scientific evidence to the contrary. (An aside: as a principle about what counts as legitimate doubting of the truth of a belief, it *must* explicitly mention that it holds of beliefs that emerge in enquiry as I just have, for an obvious reason. The principle is not simply saying don’t doubt any

belief whatsoever, unless you have specific evidence to the contrary – even if it is a belief that is not a result of any enquiry or proper procedure. Pedigree in some proper procedure therefore obviously matters in stating the principle because it is in enquiry, however implicit and internalised and swift, that beliefs are formed and cognitive commitments are made.)

Being a perfectly general principle about doubt, any plausible epistemology should be prepared to make this further generalisation, once they have accepted Pryor's key claim in his own specific Moorean setting. When we come to such a high level of generalisation in formulating the principle about doubt, we can see something emerging very clearly: that the principle itself is fallout from an even more general epistemological slogan, which does not mention doubt at all. What is that?

A slogan which has been very fundamental to the pragmatist outlook is that 'Nothing makes a difference to epistemology, which does not make a difference to enquiry.' That we should not take Descartes' arguments from the logical possibility of dreaming and other forms of systematic deception as a source of epistemological doubt simply falls out of the outlook that the slogan recommends. Such arguments do not make a difference to enquiry in any way.

Someone will immediately protest: but surely Descartes' *Meditations* itself constituted an *enquiry* of some kind, a philosophical enquiry, so the considerations it appeals to should make a difference to epistemology, even as the slogan views epistemology. This opens up a question as to what does and does not count as 'enquiry'. I don't want to take up this question on the behalf of the pragmatist in any unanchored way since I want to anchor the pragmatist outlook in more traditional responses to scepticism. So let me take a clue from Pryor's Moore as to how we may answer this question, thereby showing how close he really is to embracing the more generalised pragmatist outlook that I am pressing on him and Moore and other such traditional respondents to scepticism. Here is what Pryor says:

Different sorts of things count as defeating evidence. My perceptual justification for believing  $p$  can be defeated by evidence in favour of not- $p$ , by evidence that  $p$ 's truth is in these circumstances not ascertainable by perception, by evidence that my senses are malfunctioning, or by evidence that 'explains away' its seeming to me that  $p$  is the case. The differences between these different sorts of defeaters will not matter here. *However, I want to understand 'prima facie' and 'defeating evidence' in such a way that only ordinary evidence of the sort employed by the man in the street and by the working scientist counts as defeating your prima facie justification.* A priori sceptical arguments do not standardly introduce defeating evidence of that ordinary sort. So I don't want us to talk like this:

The sceptic grants that our experiences give us *prima facie* justification for our perceptual beliefs, but if his philosophical arguments are sound, they defeat that justification.

Rather, if we use '*prima facie*' and 'evidence' in the way that I propose, we ought to say this, instead:

The sceptic grants that our experiences purport or pre-theoretically seem to give us justification for our perceptual beliefs, but if his philosophical arguments are sound, they show that this is all an illusion. We do not have any justification (even *prima facie* justification) for beliefs about the external world, after all.

... I don't claim to be tracking ordinary usage perfectly here. This is a partly stipulative use of '*prima facie* justification'.

(Pryor 2000: 534–5, emphasis added)

Pryor is keen to stress that for him the point of the qualifier '*prima facie*' is not to allow that the justification might be defeated by something other than such ordinary empirical evidence. It will not allow it to be defeated by the sort of a priori considerations of *the logical (and metaphysical) possibility* that we might be dreaming or otherwise being deceived. He says that if we were to allow the sceptic the thought that the '*prima facie*' qualifier is in place, but justification is defeated by his sort of a priori doubts, that would be using the word '*prima facie*' in a way which departs from the stipulated use. To give such a meaning to the qualifier, would in a sense be to give up on the idea of the qualification which is intended because from Pryor's point of view it would amount to saying that really there is no justification, *even prima facie*. The sceptic precisely wants to say that, and that is why Pryor and Moore want to insist on their stipulated use of the qualifier. It is the only way to keep it in place. The idea that it is in place and we can have the sceptic's a priori considerations defeat the justification, makes no sense. It is to misunderstand the qualification.

Notice here that there is a deep distinction being drawn in the context of the epistemological issues surrounding this version of scepticism, between two sorts of considerations, empirical and a priori. Immediate justification of our perceptual beliefs on the basis of our experiences is *prima facie* to allow for defeat of the justification, but part of the burden carried by the '*prima facie*' is to insist that defeat only by empirical, not a priori, considerations is allowed. This sensible point reveals a significant clue as to what our own pragmatist slogan has in mind by 'enquiry' when it says that nothing makes a difference to epistemology, which does not make a difference to enquiry.

A priori considerations of the sort Descartes appeals to (various forms of possibility that we are deceived) make a difference to, indeed are central to, certain kinds of philosophical activity. But those activities do not constitute an ‘enquiry’. If they did, they would deprive us of the response to Cartesian scepticism which is under consideration. Only intellectual activities which traffic in empirical considerations of the sort that Pryor allows as defeaters count as enquiry. If that were not so, if philosophy itself were allowed to count as an enquiry, then (by the terms of our slogan) that would make a difference to epistemology, as it historically has in our long-standing vexations over the threat of scepticism. But it is that history which is, in part, what is being repudiated by the pragmatist in this slogan, and with it is being repudiated that generously accommodating notion of ‘enquiry’, which allows philosophy in, as an enquiry. However, my point in trying to draw out my positive proposal in the way I have is to say that there is nothing very radical or wholesale about this repudiation. One familiar and traditional answer to scepticism, one way of resisting one of the sceptic’s premises, as we have just seen in the Moorean response, is precisely to say something that is a very special case, of the far more general outlook that is summarised by this slogan. What Pryor wants to rule out in the very specific setting of his Moorean response, (i.e. the power of certain kinds of a priori considerations to defeat intuitive ideas of immediate justification by a misunderstanding of his qualifier ‘*prima facie*’) is a special case of another ruling out, the ruling out by our slogan of certain kinds of activities, such as those that Descartes indulges in his first two *Meditations*, as being forms of enquiry.

I believe that Wittgenstein, when he repeatedly denied that philosophy was an enquiry, and when he said that it was a source of much unnecessary confusion to think of it as one, was really saying something quite akin to what I have in mind by restricting what is allowed by ‘enquiry’ in understanding the slogan. I will return to Wittgenstein in a moment. What I want to insist on is that this position is quite different from another which says that philosophy is indeed an enquiry, only very different from others, and it provides a *context* in which the entire sceptical line of thought is legitimate, and that the sceptic is only illegitimate when he presents his position as *decontextualised* claims about knowledge and doubt. I don’t have the space to discuss this sort of contextualism in detail. I will just register this difference here and not elaborate on my reasons for preferring pragmatism, as I have presented it, which is less tolerant of scepticism than even this sort of contextualism. By denying (with Wittgenstein) that philosophy is properly thought of as an enquiry, it is denying that scepticism has its proper place within the context of philosophical ‘enquiry’. That is why on the basis of the slogan, ‘What makes no difference to enquiry, makes no difference to epistemology’, it can say what this contextualism cannot say – namely, that scepticism has *no* proper place.

Just as with the positive presumption idea, there are two ways to put

the point which is expressed by the slogan and which underlies the idea of the positive presumption. One is to say that the slogan linking enquiry to epistemology can itself be seen as an elevation to the highest possible level of generality, the very principle which is being invoked by Pryor in his understanding of the qualifier ‘*prima facie*’ in his Moorean response to scepticism about the external world. The other, perhaps more correct, way is to put it in reverse: Pryor applies this most general principle expressed in the slogan to the focus of his more specific concern of responding to Descartes within all the details of Descartes’ procedure. I say more correct because it allows us to capture the general insight in Pryor and Moore without having it spoilt by their talk of experiences and justifying our perceptual beliefs on the basis of experiences. No violence is done at all to what Pryor wants to say by seeing what he says as a specific application of a more general principle. And the insight does not become less of one, just because it is seen as being more general than it appeared in its (dispensable) Moorean setting.

A great deal remains to be said about what the details of a pragmatist answer to scepticism would look like, once we shed talk both of *experiences* and talk of the *justification* (on the basis of these experiences) of perceptual beliefs of which we are anyway certain. I will not pursue those details in this chapter,<sup>2</sup> which is only intended to convey, among other things, that this pragmatist answer to scepticism is not insulated from, but is in fact quite continuous with much more traditional responses. What will have to remain for further elaboration on another occasion is how much the pragmatist response clears up and improves upon the traditional responses with which it is continuous, in these ways.

### III

Before closing, I should like to say something briefly about the relationship between this pragmatist response and some of Wittgenstein’s remarks on scepticism.

In his paper, ‘Facts and Certainty’ (Wright 1985), Crispin Wright draws out of Wittgenstein’s remarks in *On Certainty* a train of thought directed against Cartesian scepticism. Wright thinks that Wittgenstein’s argument is a vast improvement upon Moore’s ‘Proof’. One improvement, Wright says, is that coming to grips with what Wittgenstein says forces us to present Moore’s own argument in a less dogmatic light. Moore is said to go from:

I I have a hand (believed or asserted in the appropriate circumstances).

to:

II There is a material world (since a hand is a material object, existing in space).

Wright says that rather than present I as a primitive unshakable conviction, Moore ought to admit that it has grounds, grounds in our experience as of a hand.<sup>3</sup> He accordingly rewrites and expands the surface of the argument as follows:

I I have an experience as of a hand.<sup>4</sup>

Therefore:

II I have a hand.

Therefore:

III There is a material world.

The argument, then, is that the warrant 'I have' for I gives me a warrant for II, which because it entails III, gives me a warrant for III.

We have discussed the difficulties that Descartes poses for going from I to II in raising the second variety of scepticism about the external world, and have had our say about them. Wright on behalf of Wittgenstein wants to read a variant of these difficulties into the more expanded argument involving I, II and III. He argues that there is something misleading about thinking that the (defeasible) warrant that I provides for II is transmitted across the entailment from the II to III. Compare this example about hands and the material world, he says, to the passage of inference from:

I Jones has just written an 'X' on that piece of paper.

to:

II Jones has just voted.

to:

III There is an election going on.

In this example, Wright points out that I would not provide evidence for II in a society in which placing an 'X' on a piece of paper was done in all sorts of other social practices than voting. We would then need to have evidence that an election was indeed going on before we saw I as warrant for II. That is, we would need independent evidence for III. III could not be established by the transmission of warrant mentioned earlier. Hence, without independent evidence for III, I itself would not even begin to provide warrant for II. And he says that a sceptic can now be set up to say that in fact the I-II-III argu-

ment for the conclusion that there is a material world is just as it is in the case of the voting. We have no warrant from an experience (propositions of type I) to a perceptual belief (propositions of type II), without prior warrant for there being a material world (proposition III). But there is in fact no evidence for there being a material world (evidence for III) except via justifying our perceptual beliefs (justifying propositions of type II). So III cannot ever be justified, and neither therefore can we ever justify our perceptual beliefs about the external world.

Wright says that there are hints in Wittgenstein that exploit some remarks of such a sceptic himself to develop an anti-sceptical strategy. The challenge is to find III reasonable, and to do so independent of finding II reasonable on the basis of I. What other way but via transmission from I and II can III possibly be found reasonable? If we could find III *not* to be the sort of thing (the sort of proposition) which is based on *any* kind of *evidence*, if it could be justified by means other than appeal to evidence, that would be one way to meet the challenge. And various transcendental arguments have long tried their hand with this strategy. But another strategy might be to say that it is not the sort of thing for which evidence is relevant because it does not really purport to state a fact. It has more the status of something like a convention. This is essentially Wright's strategy on behalf of Wittgenstein. And, he says, Wittgenstein tries to get this idea from something this sceptic himself says, which is that there is absolutely no evidence that one *can* give for III. I will not pause to give a full exposition of how Wittgenstein is supposed to get this idea out of the sceptic. The discussion in Wright's exposition of Wittgenstein where this is elaborated is most interesting, but I will not summarise it here, nor assess its merits; my purpose here is simply to make a comparison between Wittgenstein's conclusions and the very general and rudimentary pragmatist view I have teased out of Moorean arguments.

It seems absolutely central both to how Wittgenstein sees the sceptic and to how he responds to him, that the type III proposition provides in some sense an 'institutional' setting. Wright is clear about this. That is the whole point of the analogy with elections. It is only because what the type III proposition expresses –the fact that an election is going on– provides an institutional setting of the relevant sort that we can see the relevant type I proposition about marking an X as evidence for the relevant type II proposition that a vote has been registered. Exactly this role of providing an institutional setting is given to the type III proposition that there is a material world in making possible the passage from the type I proposition that one has an experience as of a hand to the type II proposition that there is a hand, in the I-II-III epistemological example. This role is given to it in the very set-up of the sceptic's claims and because that is so, it is possible for Wittgenstein to see it as also having a special conventional status in his *response* to the sceptic.

Wittgenstein spoke of propositions of this sort as ‘hinge’ propositions. Wright cites him on these:

[T]he *questions* that we raise and our *doubts* depend on the fact that some propositions are exempt from doubt, are as it were, like hinges on which those turn. That is to say, that it is the logic of our scientific investigations that certain things are *in deed* not doubted.

(OC 341–2)

This thought is deeply sympathetic to what I have tried to draw out of Moore into a more general epistemological viewpoint. I had said that this position distinguishes between propositions which we are certain of, which we do not think of as in need of justification, and others which are in the nature of hypotheses, which scientific enquiry sees as propositions to be investigated, and it is only for the latter that these questions of justification arise – as to whether we be justified in admitting them into our beliefs held with certainty or not. But during that very scientific investigation regarding these hypotheses, we cannot possibly doubt or think of as needing justification the beliefs we hold with certainty. And the reason for this is simple. The beliefs we hold certain provide the standard by which the investigation just described is to be carried out. Without them, we would not know how to assess the deliverances of our investigation. And what is a standard for investigation cannot be up for question and justification, at least during the investigation. If this is what Wittgenstein had in mind, it is entirely of a piece with what we have extracted out of Moore by generalisation.<sup>5</sup> This notion of ‘hinge’ is very much present in pragmatist epistemology.

But in the very next sentence after the brief passage I have cited, Wittgenstein adds this:

But it isn’t as if the situation is like this: we just can’t investigate everything, and for that reason we are forced to rest content with the assumption. If I want the door to turn, the hinges must stay put.

Here the suggestion seems to be that these hinge propositions are not the sort of thing that can be doubted at all. Being institutional, they are not the sorts of things that can ever be doubted even if there is positive empirical counter-evidence. Evidence is never to the point with regard to these propositions, they are not propositions which are part of a fact-stating discourse. We may shed an institution or practice, but that is not because of the standard sort of doubt that may on occasion arise due to positive empirical evidence against it.

This thought departs conspicuously from the pragmatism I have built up to. The pragmatist, when he says that beliefs or propositions we hold with

certainty do not need justification because they are not to be doubted on the basis of a generalised doubt owing to a logical or metaphysical possibility, is nevertheless very clear that it may be the case that they come to be doubted on the basis of specific counter-evidence that might be brought against them. There is no question, therefore, of them not being part of fact-stating discourse. That is why the pragmatist does not restrict these 'hinge' beliefs or propositions to such things as 'There is a material world', as Wittgenstein does. Even type II propositions can count as hinges, indeed all beliefs held with certainty (not just that I have a hand, but that the earth is not flat, for example) count as hinges. They help to provide the standard by which we can then assess in our investigations whether *other* propositions, those held not as certainties but as hypotheses, are propositions which we are justified in adding to our certain beliefs or not (or not yet). So, on this outlook, there is no institutional role for something like proposition III, if that means they can never be doubted on the basis of evidence. If their role is institutional, that is *only in the sense* that they provide this sort of background standard. But some of them, if evidence emerges to put them into doubt, may well be removed from the class of standard-providing certain beliefs.

This spoils the entire picture of Wright's sceptical set-up. III is just a general truth, no doubt entailed by various type II propositions, but both type II propositions and proposition III can be hinges in what Wittgenstein in that passage called the 'logic of our scientific investigations'. And if we have understood the reasons for this, as they were elaborated in the generalisations from Moore in the last section, that shows further, that propositions of type I are completely out of the picture, at least while the epistemological issues are *being framed*. As I said, it is only when there is positive empirical reason to doubt type II propositions that we might introduce type I propositions to pick up the slack in accounting for the initial error in holding the type II propositions, which have been put into doubt by the positive evidence against them. To see their role this way is not to see them as having any framing role in epistemology, as Wright on behalf of Wittgenstein does. So, in fact, if the lessons of the last section are good lessons, Wright's expanded rewrite of Moore which introduces type I propositions is exactly what is *not* needed. If we see the institutional role of hinge propositions in the way I have tried to in my generalising move out of Moore (and out of Pryor's excellent reading of Moore), we will see that not just III but even type II propositions can be hinges, and moreover that type I propositions are not needed at the outset in an anti-sceptical epistemological outlook. The entire I-II-III set-up loses its rationale.

Only a core of Wittgenstein's idea of hinge propositions – that they cannot be doubted while scientific investigation is ongoing – remains in the pragmatist outlook, once the class of hinge propositions is seen to be so much more accommodating, and once the notion of experience is relegated to a subsidiary and *ex post* role.

There are lots of questions which remain unanswered in this pragmatist epistemology which stands apart from all these details of both Moore's and Wittgenstein's arguments but which shares some elements with them both. Perhaps the most urgent one is whether it will not threaten us with the spectre of relativism. If what counts as truth and knowledge is always judged relative to a background of our current beliefs held with certainty (a point that I insist on), are we not threatened with the idea that concepts of truth and knowledge are to be thought of *relative* to the point of view provided by our current beliefs, so held? Will not beliefs held with certainty at different times provide for different points of view, in just the way that relativism has always claimed? I think there are good reasons to deny that, just because we judge truth by the light of our current certain beliefs, this sanctions a legitimacy to the talk of truth relative to a point of view (and, therefore, of alternative possible points of view, as relativism claims).<sup>6</sup> Philosophers have tended to think that if we develop fallibilist ideas in epistemology in the ways suggested in this chapter (as opposed to other more standard and traditional ways which grant to the sceptic that fallibilism shows that we are in a weak epistemic position which falls short of the *admirable epistemological standards* that the sceptic sets up in his argument appealing to the epistemological relevance of his *a priori* argument) then we will inevitably be landed with notions of truth and knowledge that are governed by the idea of 'points of view'. Landed, that is, with the threat of relativism. That tendency is deeply mistaken, and when it is coupled with a (quite justified) distaste for relativism itself, it makes it seem as if there is no fallibilist answer to the sceptic which does not grant to him that the *standard he sets for us in epistemology are indeed admirable*. To grant to him that his standards are admirable is to grant also that we can never say for sure of any given empirical belief that it is true. And that, in turn, is to grant to him that truth cannot be a goal of empirical enquiry since what sort of a goal is it that we cannot ever say when, in any given case, we have achieved it?<sup>7</sup> It would make enquirers like those who send a message in a bottle out to sea, with no reassurance as to whether their enquiries are successful.

But truth *is* a goal of enquiry, and it is only something like the version of fallibilism being presented in this chapter which allows for it being so. All that remains to be shown is why this tendency to find relativism lurking near fallibilism is mistaken, why the very talk of a 'point of view' should never have any purchase, and certainly does not get any purchase from the more radical ways in which I have tried to develop the fallibilism that Moore and Pryor frankly allow in their anti-sceptical arguments. I will not, however, be able to show that in this chapter.<sup>8</sup> I just want to register it here as a bit of unfinished business.

Even just registering it brings out at least the motivation for why I have tried to present the pragmatist insight in its most general form as a conceptual outgrowth from its own special application in more traditional

arguments against the sceptic. In seeing it this way, one comes to see the ground and full content of what otherwise come off as breezy slogans, slogans such as ‘Nothing makes a difference to epistemology, which does not make a difference to enquiry.’ It’s a matter of some philosophical importance to give these slogans ground and content. I have conceded from the very start that there is no defeating the sceptic without rejecting one or other of his premises. But I have not conceded something else that philosophers assume, and which they think follows from what I have conceded, i.e. that all responses to the sceptic must at least grant that by the standards we most admire in epistemology, we cannot really answer the sceptic. Once we take in the ground and the full content of pragmatist slogans via a scrutiny of their specific application in a specific response to a specific version of scepticism, we give ourselves the right to say that those are *not* the standards we admire at all in epistemology.

### Notes

- 1 It may well be the case that one cannot confront the sceptic in this way without in turn implying an alternative philosophy of mind or an alternative metaphysics, as they are found in Davidson and Putnam. But those responses do not offer any alternative intuitive epistemological ideas of justification to begin with as Pryor and Moore are doing. Instead they make an outright appeal to notions of externalism about mind or about interpretation, which speak to issues at some distance from the epistemology. It turns out also that John McDowell often speaks of immediate justification in something (though not exactly) like the way that Pryor does – see especially his ‘Criteria, Defeasibility, and Knowledge’ in his 1998b – but it is presented by him too as something that *falls out of* an essentially anti-Cartesian philosophy of mind. Thus, his position is vulnerable to someone contesting the philosophy of mind, as many have done.
- 2 I do so in Bilgrami 2002. One of the questions discussed there is how such a pragmatist view is wilfully less attentive to questions about pedigree of our belief in notions of proper procedure, at any rate of those beliefs we are certain of. This point needs detailed discussion and justification, which I cannot give here, though I do believe that it is perfectly justified. My thanks to Crispin Wright for insisting that this needs explicit acknowledgement and discussion.
- 3 Wright actually says something more elaborate as ‘Some proposition describing the relevant features of my experience during the relevant period of holding up my hand’ (see p. 435).
- 4 Notice that Pryor had interpreted Moore as saying this. So both Wright and Pryor want to read something into Moore which is not explicitly there.
- 5 Quine gives a fair statement of this pragmatist idea when he says ‘The saving consideration is that we continue to take seriously our own particular aggregate science, our own particular world-theory, or loose total fabric of quasi-theories, whatever it may be. Unlike Descartes, we own and use our beliefs of the moment . . .’ (Quine 1960: 24). Levi 1983 takes the same view. Building on what he describes as a Peircian pragmatist outlook, Levi elaborates, more systematically than any other pragmatist ever has, the ways in which our beliefs function as such a standard.

- 6 This is the real ambition and point of Davidson's paper 'On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme' (Davidson 1973–1974), and it is one of its strengths that, if it is effective, it would show that there is no reason to think that the only way to oppose relativism is to embrace some sort of metaphysical realism or absolute conception of reality which is of a piece with Cartesian sceptical ideas. But see my next footnote for a point of irony regarding Davidson on this subject.
- 7 Davidson, in Davidson 2000, explicitly takes the view that we can never say when one of our beliefs is true, that therefore truth can never be the goal of enquiry, and that any answer to the sceptic can at best be the blindsighted one of showing that many of our beliefs must be true, *without any surely as to which ones*. This in my view is all a very bad turn in his philosophy. The laudable ambition of his earlier paper, which I mentioned in the last footnote, now loses much of its point with these later developments in his thinking. These later developments are all at odds with that earlier ambition. If he is right in thinking in that earlier paper that the very talk of points of view is illegitimate, then the kind of pragmatist outlook on the concepts of truth and knowledge, which I am advocating in this chapter, is liberated from its most urgent threat, the threat of relativisation of these notions to points of view. And such a pragmatist outlook would find quite wrong and quite unnecessary the sorts of things that I have noted (with disappointment) in Davidson's more recent writings. For more on this, see Bilgrami 2002.
- 8 It is the theme of Bilgrami 2002.

# WITTGENSTEIN'S REFUTATION OF IDEALISM

*Michael Williams*

Wittgenstein's notes, collected as *On Certainty*, are a gold mine of ideas for philosophers concerned with knowledge and scepticism.<sup>1</sup> But in my view, Wittgenstein's approach to scepticism is still not well understood. Obviously, a short essay is no place for an exhaustive treatment of Wittgenstein's anti-sceptical ideas. Instead, I shall present a reconstruction of a particular argument that I call 'Wittgenstein's Refutation of Idealism'. This argument is developed in the first sixty-five sections of *On Certainty*, although there is a later passage (OC 90) that must also be considered.

To appreciate this argument, it is essential to be clear about its target. It is evident that Wittgenstein's thoughts on scepticism are prompted by Moore's 'Proof of an External World' (Moore 1939) and 'A Defense of Common Sense' (Moore 1925). But these well-known papers differ in an important way. In his 'Proof', Moore's topic is external world scepticism in its most general form: his aim is to prove, in defiance of the sceptic and idealist, that external objects, defined as 'things to be met with in space', really do exist. By contrast, in his 'Defense', Moore undertakes to defend a body of rather more specific beliefs: that the earth has existed for many years past, that he has never been far from its surface, and much else besides. To be sure, Wittgenstein is deeply interested in both of Moore's projects. Nevertheless, in the sections that I shall be considering, he is concerned – mainly and perhaps even exclusively – with Moore's 'Proof'. Wittgenstein's argument is about external world scepticism, and some of its essential points are specific to scepticism of this type.

What I have just said goes against a very natural reading of Wittgenstein's text. To explain why, let me distinguish two forms of scepticism, Agrippan and Cartesian. Agrippan scepticism is centred on the problem of the regress of justification. Knowledge differs from mere true belief by being justified. But in making my grounds for a given belief explicit, I enter a further claim which will need grounds of its own. The sceptic can now ask me to produce these, and so on indefinitely. My initial claim, the sceptic will say, has involved me in a vicious regress of grounds for grounds for grounds . . . If at some point I dig in my heels and refuse to play along, I will be making a

brute assumption; and knowledge cannot be based on a mere assumption. If at some point I repeat myself, I will be reasoning in a circle. Keep trying to say something new, say nothing, or repeat something already said: there is no fourth option. Yet none of the available three produces knowledge.

Cartesian scepticism differs from Agrippan in the central role it assigns to sceptical hypotheses: hypotheses that are wildly at variance with our ordinary beliefs but which seem extraordinarily difficult to rule out. The paradigm Cartesian problem is Descartes' problem of our knowledge of the external world; and the paradigm sceptical hypothesis is that our experience is controlled by an Evil Deceiver, so that the external world, as we ordinarily conceive it, does not exist. In particular, there are no physical objects. If the external world is the physical world, there is no external world.

Now Wittgenstein clearly advances the following views:

- 1 There are bedrock certainties, propositions or judgements that we do not and (in some way) cannot doubt. These fundamental certainties can be thought of as 'framework judgements' in the following sense: by lying 'apart from the route traveled by inquiry', they constitute the framework within which practices of inquiring, justifying beliefs, arguing, asking for and giving reasons, making knowledge claims, etc. take place.
- 2 While recognising bedrock certainties, Wittgenstein departs from the traditional foundationalist conception of basic beliefs. Judgements that make justification possible are themselves outside the scope of justification. At the most fundamental level, certainty is grounded in the conditions of meaning or understanding. It is not a matter of evidence, even self-evidence. This is the burden of Wittgenstein's reluctance to think of bedrock certainties as things we know to be true.
- 3 In further contrast to the basic beliefs of traditional foundationalism, bedrock certainties are extremely heterogeneous. They include (among other things) elementary mathematical propositions ( $12 \times 12 = 144$ ) and simple recognitional judgements ('Here is one hand'); but also quite general claims about the world around us ('The Earth has existed for many years past', 'Every human being has two parents', 'There are physical objects').

Noticing these aspects of his thoughts, it is natural to suppose that Wittgenstein's anti-sceptical reflections are directed primarily towards the Agrippan problem. The Agrippan sceptic insists that knowledge can be founded only on prior knowledge. This is false, since basic certainties are not items of knowledge. The regress is thus blocked. But because of the heterogeneity of our framework judgements, solutions to Cartesian scepticism follow automatically. Our framework provides a setting in which we can come to know all sorts of things about the external world, the past, and so on.

Call this account of Wittgenstein's anti-sceptical strategy 'the Framework

Reading'.<sup>2</sup> Its central idea is that Wittgenstein sees both Agrippan and Cartesian scepticism as failing to a single master argument. Once we understand how the frame of our epistemic practices is constituted, we have no need for a specific response to a problem like that of the external world. Indeed, it is unclear what form such a specific response could take or what it could accomplish. But Wittgenstein does give such a response. His approach to Cartesian scepticism is much more subtle than the Framework Reading implies.

## 1 Wittgenstein's argument: the problem phase

In its fine structure, Wittgenstein's refutation of idealism is complex, with numerous ideas in play throughout. Nevertheless, it can usefully be divided into three main phases: the problem phase, the diagnostic phase and the therapeutic phase. What marks the transition from one phase to the next is an admission that the problem of scepticism has not yet been explored in sufficient depth or presented in the proper light.

The Cartesian sceptic asks whether we know that there are any physical objects at all. Moore counters by first inquiring what we mean by 'physical objects', concluding that we mean 'things to be met with in space'. He then gives his proof. Holding up his hands in good light (while making certain appropriate gestures), he announces: 'Here is one hand and here is another'. It follows that at least two physical objects are known to exist. Moore is confident that his proof is a good one. The conclusion follows logically from the premises, and he knows the premises to be true.

It is clear to Wittgenstein that Moore's proof is completely ineffective. Moore wants to assure the sceptic that there are physical objects. He does so by insisting that he (Moore) knows that two such things exist, rather as I might assure a friend that he has not missed the last train to the city, since I know that there are at least two evening departures. But the sceptic isn't seeking reassurance and, in any case, Moore is in no special position to give it. Moore has misunderstood the kind of response that scepticism demands. Thus:

If you do know that *here is one hand*, we'll grant you all the rest. When one says that such and such a proposition can't be proved, of course that does not mean that it cannot be derived from other propositions; any proposition can be derived from other ones. But they may be no more certain than it is itself. . . .

From its *seeming* to me – or to everyone – to be so, it doesn't follow that it *is* so.

What we can ask is whether it makes sense to doubt it.

(OC 1–2)

The sceptic thinks that he has found reason to question whether we know anything whatsoever about the external world. If his reasons for doubting are coherent, his doubts cannot be met by presenting particular examples of the kind of knowledge that is in question generally. But do his doubts really make sense?

Wittgenstein never wavers in his conviction that they do not: the sceptic's doubts are wholly illusory. This is another reason why they cannot be met with a proof. If the scruples of the sceptic or idealist are incoherent, then so are the reassurances of the realist. No proof is possible because there is nothing to prove. This means that a response to scepticism cannot be dialectical: that is, it cannot take the form of showing that the sceptic is wrong, proving what he doubts. Rather, it must be diagnostic and therapeutic. It must identify the conceptual misunderstanding that gives rise to the illusion of sceptical doubt; and it must explain why the sceptic fails to see the illusion for what it is.

While Moore's proof is deeply misconceived, it has considerable diagnostic interest. By reflecting on it, we can discern a number of important features of the logic of 'doubt' and 'know'. We can also find clues to a deeper diagnosis of sceptical worries. Wittgenstein makes a number of interconnected suggestions.

The first is that ordinary doubts are essentially linked to the possibility of their being resolved. Thus:

If e.g. someone says 'I don't know if there's a hand here' he might be told 'Look closer'. – This possibility of satisfying oneself is part of the language-game. Is one of its essential features.

(OC 3)

More than this, doubts do not arise as easily as the sceptic is apt to imagine. Wittgenstein writes:

[W]hat about such a proposition as 'I know I have a brain? Can I doubt it? Grounds for *doubt* are lacking! Everything speaks in its favour, nothing against it. Nevertheless it is imaginable that my skull should turn out empty when it was operated on.

(OC 4)

The sceptic often argues as if the bare possibility of falsehood were a ground for doubt. But that is not at all how we normally proceed.

Wittgenstein's second point is that Moore's proof is not just ineffective: it involves a misuse of the expression 'I know'. Wittgenstein asks:

Can one enumerate what one knows (like Moore)? Straight off like that, I believe not. – For otherwise the expression 'I know' gets

misused. And through this misuse a queer and extremely important mental state seems to be revealed.

(OC 6)

Wittgenstein's immediate concern is with the misuse itself, rather than with what it seems to reveal. The things Moore assures us that he knows are not ordinarily the objects of knowledge claims. Indeed, they are not ordinarily expressed in claims of any kind. Rather, knowledge and certainty are shown in practice, in the way I act: 'My life shows that I know or am certain that there is a chair over there . . .' (OC 7). This certainty has nothing to do with 'making sure' (OC 9).

Simple as they are, these points raise the question of whether Moore's assurances are so much as intelligible.

I know that a sick man is lying here? Nonsense! I am sitting at his bedside, I am looking attentively into his face. – So I don't know, then, that there is a sick man lying here? Neither the question nor the assertion makes sense. Any more than the assertion 'I am here', which I might yet use at any moment, if a suitable occasion presented itself . . . 'I know that there is a sick man lying here', used in an unsuitable situation seems not to be nonsense but rather seems to be matter-of-course, only because one can fairly easily imagine a situation to fit it . . .

(OC 10)

Stringing together meaningful words in a grammatically acceptable way is insufficient to guarantee a meaningful utterance: a speaker's words must also be contextually appropriate. If they are not, it will be up for grabs whether he understands the words he comes out with, whether his utterance is a statement or just a verbal tic. We fail to see this because, even when an utterance fails to be contextually appropriate, we can easily imagine a situation to fit it. It therefore seems not to be nonsense even though (in its actual context) that is just what it is. Moore's proof is an instance of this phenomenon:

... one thinks that the words 'I know that . . .' are in place where there is no doubt, and hence even where the expression of doubt would be unintelligible.

We just do not see how very specialised the use of 'I know' is.

(OC 10–11)

The use of 'I know' is specialised because it is linked with doubting. But as the earlier remarks on doubting revealed, Moore's propositions are normally not doubted at all. Moore has therefore failed to enter his knowledge claims in a suitable situation. They may seem to be intelligible but in truth they are nonsense.

Wittgenstein's initial remarks on the scope of ordinary doubt might give the impression that only the legitimacy of the sceptic's 'doubts' is in question. This is not so. At issue is their intelligibility. It is not just that we do not doubt the things that Moore would like to say he knows: the question is whether we understand what it would be to doubt them. This is where the point that doubts too need grounds comes back into play. To express a doubt about a claim is to suggest that the speaker may have made some kind of mistake. If I cannot say what mistake – if I cannot specify how he might have gone wrong – then no intelligible doubt has been expressed.

Just as entering a doubt implies the possibility of saying what mistake might have been made, so entering a knowledge claim implies the possibility of saying how one knows. This will often mean being able to give appropriate grounds or evidence. Thus, an expression of doubt, implying the possibility of a mistake, can be met with an explanation of how one knows, an explanation that will show that no mistake was in fact made. The symmetry in the intelligibility requirements for doubting and knowledge claiming – the need to be able to say what mistake might have been made or how one knows – makes plain why the (in principle) possibility of resolving doubts (by explaining how one knows) is built into the language-game as one of its essential features.

The possibility of imagining suitable contexts for Moorean assurances is not the only source of their deceptive air of intelligibility. To explain why, Wittgenstein picks up the suggestion that Moore's misuse of 'I know' seems to reveal a queer and important mental state. What makes the 'mental state' of knowing queer and important is that 'know' is factive: that is, 'I know that there is a hand here' entails 'There is a hand here'.

... 'I know' seems to describe a state of affairs which guarantees what is known, guarantees it as a fact. One always forgets the expression 'I thought I knew'.

(OC 12)

This remark probes more deeply into Moore's confusion. Moore thinks that he can report (quite straightforwardly and intelligibly) on his current mental state (it is one of knowing). At the same time, because 'know' is factive, he thinks that in offering his reports he establishes what the sceptic claims to doubt. But Moore's 'reports' are just knowledge claims, and the truth of such claims certainly does not follow from his making them (OC 13). On the contrary:

It needs to be *shown* that no mistake was possible. Giving the assurance 'I know' doesn't suffice. For it is after all only an assurance that I can't be making a mistake, and it needs to be *objectively* established that I am not making a mistake about *that*.

(OC 15)

Can Moore reply that he doesn't just know: he knows that he knows? No. The thesis that knowing implies knowing that one knows is just another way of saying that 'I know' means 'I am incapable of being wrong'; and whether I am incapable of error 'needs to be established objectively' (OC 16). When a knowledge claim is entered, the issue is not the claimant's mental state but his epistemic status: his right to enter a claim in a way that implies immunity from error.

Can Moore earn this right by 'establishing' that he has hands? Perhaps not, if 'establish' means 'give grounds'. Grounds need to be antecedently more certain than the proposition for which they are cited as grounds (OC 1) and, in the case of Moorean judgements, it is not clear that anything meets this condition. Naturally, there is no concession to the sceptic here. Questions of establishing one's right to make a knowledge claim only arise where doubt is intelligible, which brings us back to the question of whether, in the case of Moorean judgements, mistakes are possible. Wittgenstein continues:

Suppose now I say 'I am incapable of being wrong about this: that is a book' while I point to an object. What would a mistake here be like? And have I any clear idea of it?

(OC 17)

It is tempting to treat this question as rhetorical, the implied answer being 'No, I do not have any clear idea'. Given this answer, we can conclude that, in connection with Moorean judgements, talk of knowledge and doubt are equally out of place. As Marie McGinn puts it, Moorean judgements do not 'embed in epistemic contexts'. They lie outside the scope of knowledge, evidence, justification and doubt. They belong to the framework within which epistemic claims can be entered: the framework within which such claims become intelligible.

The ideas just sketched figure prominently in what I have called the Framework Reading. On this account of Wittgenstein's approach to scepticism, the essential moves are made very early. Of course, there is a lot of detail to be filled in. But the crucial idea – that scepticism is turned aside, not by propositions that are known to be true, but by judgements that it does not make sense to doubt – is in place. However, what we need to notice is that Wittgenstein himself does not present matters in this light. Even if Moorean judgements do have this special status, we cannot answer the sceptic merely by pointing this out. Far from being all over bar the shouting, the argument has barely begun.

Wittgenstein makes this very clear:

'I know' often means: I have the proper grounds for my statement. So if the other person is acquainted with the language-game, he would admit that I know. The other, if he is acquainted with the lan-

guage-game, must be able to imagine *how* one may know something of this kind.

The statement 'I know that here is a hand' may then be continued 'for it's my hand that I'm looking at'. Then the reasonable man will not doubt that I know. . . . Nor will the idealist; rather he will say that he was not dealing with the practical doubt which is being dismissed, but there is a further doubt behind that one. . . . That this is an illusion has to be shown in a different way.

(OC 18–19)

These important passages throw into relief what I regard as so misleading about the Framework Reading: it makes Wittgenstein's response to scepticism too direct. As a result, it loses sight of an essential point: that comments on the logic of ordinary doubting and knowledge claiming will cut no ice if we are in the grip of the illusion that there is a special kind of philosophical doubt, purporting to call epistemic ordinary procedures into question.

This point is worth elaboration. Marie McGinn claims that Wittgenstein's key insight is that, because Moorean judgements do not embed in epistemic contexts, we do not stand in an 'epistemic relation' to such judgements. Accordingly, Moore's insistence that he knows such things to be true *and* the sceptic's attempt to doubt them *both* misfire. But no such conclusion is yet available. The most that has been shown is that such judgements are not *ordinarily* treated as either supportable by evidence or open to question. However – and Wittgenstein is well aware of this reply – our indulgent attitude is merely a reflection of practical exigencies. We have to take lots of things for granted if we are to get on with life. But in the context of philosophical reflection, where practical considerations are set aside, we can put ourselves into an epistemic relation with the most banal everyday certainties. Indeed, we can come to appreciate that we always stand in such a relation, even though for practical purposes we may ignore the epistemic demands that this relation imposes.

This is why I call the opening phase of Wittgenstein's refutation of idealism 'the problem phase'. The intent of his opening remarks is not to answer the sceptic in a direct way – however provisional and incomplete the answer – but rather to alert us to the peculiar and problematic character of philosophical doubt. The question 'Have I any clear idea of what it would be to be mistaken with respect to a Moorean judgement?' is not answered. To be sure, that the answer will be negative is implied by the claim that the idea of a doubt behind ordinary doubt is an illusion. But we are given the warning that this claim must be established 'in a different way', i.e. by doing more than rehearse the characteristic features of ordinary doubting and knowledge claiming.

Of course, it would be wrong to suggest that nothing has been accomplished. Revealing how different sceptical doubt is from ordinary doubt may

not refute the sceptic but it can and should shake our casual confidence that we understand him. A vivid awareness of the peculiarity of sceptical doubt should make us receptive to the thought that a diagnostic investigation is worthwhile.

## 2 The diagnostic phase

The first step towards dispelling the illusion of a doubt behind ordinary doubt is to identify its source. In Wittgenstein's eyes, the proximate source of the illusion is a specific misunderstanding of our conceptual-linguistic situation. Identifying this misunderstanding is the task of his argument's diagnostic phase. However, before presenting his diagnostic suggestion, Wittgenstein addresses resistance to the idea that any diagnostic enquiry is necessary. Having stressed once more the utter ineffectiveness of Moore's assurances, Wittgenstein remarks:

... My believing the trustworthy man stems from my admitting that it is possible for him to make sure. But someone who says that perhaps there are no physical objects makes no such admission.

The idealist's question would be something like: 'What right have I not to doubt the existence of my hands?' (And to that the answer can't be: I know that they exist.) But someone who asks such a question is overlooking the fact that a doubt about existence only works in a language-game. Hence, that we should first have to ask: what would such a doubt be like?, and don't understand this straight off.

(OC 23–4)

Again, Wittgenstein conspicuously declines to offer a quick-and-dirty refutation. He does *not* argue (as we might have expected) that, since the possibility of resolving doubts belongs to our language-game as one of its essential features, sceptical or philosophical doubt is an obvious non-starter. Instead, he suggests that we ask what a sceptical doubt would amount to, warning us not to assume that we already know. His intent is clear: the peculiar character of philosophical doubt is not a refutation of scepticism, but it is an invitation to pursue a diagnostic enquiry. If a doubt about existence only works in a language-game, and if the game of philosophical reflection is distinct from that of ordinary doubting, we are entitled to ask how the philosophical game is to be carried on.

The legitimacy of this question is reinforced by further reflections on 'going wrong' or 'making a mistake', reflections that invoke some of Wittgenstein's most characteristic ideas about meaning and understanding. These are that understanding involves mastering concepts; possessing a concept involves learning the use of a word; and what is acquired, when the use of a word

is learned, is at bottom a practical ability. By this last claim, Wittgenstein means that we use words without guidance from explicitly formulated rules. This applies to epistemic concepts such as 'doubt' as much as to any others. One can be wrong about so simple a matter as there being a hand, or an elementary calculation; but in particular circumstances, error is impossible and doubt misplaced (OC 25). However, we cannot give a rule specifying what those circumstances are. If we tried to give a rule, it would involve the expression 'in normal circumstances'. And although normal circumstances can be recognised, they cannot be precisely described (OC 27). The ultimate absence of rules make itself felt in the attempt to state rules. Wittgenstein concludes that 'Practice in the use of the rule shows what is a mistake in its employment' (OC 29).

It is no accident that the idea of understanding as something essentially grounded in linguistic practice should make an appearance at just this point. The first phase of the argument ended with the sceptic or idealist denying any concern with 'practical' doubt. We now see that talk of a non-practical doubt is dangerously equivocal. Of course, philosophical questions may be 'impractical' in that, to consider them, we must set aside pursuits like making a living or cooking dinner. That is, a philosophical question may be purely theoretical. But no question is 'impractical' in the sense of 'intelligible in abstraction from all particular practices of enquiry'.

Wittgenstein makes the point by recurring to Moore:

It's not a matter of *Moore's* knowing that there's a hand there, but rather we should not understand him if he were to say 'Of course I may be wrong about this'. We should ask 'What is it like to make such a mistake as that?' – e.g. what's it like to discover that it was a mistake?

(OC 32)

It is not as though we have some general-purpose concept of 'making a mistake' such that, in any circumstances whatsoever, and without any particular error-possibility in mind, we can intelligibly say 'Maybe you are making a mistake'. So once more, what is the language-game of philosophical doubt?

The absolutely crucial feature of philosophical doubt has already been identified. It involves taking seriously the possibility that no physical objects exist. If there is a genuine possibility here, we can see why the idealist wants to know what right I have not to doubt the existence of my hands. We can also see why this doubt, once entered, may turn out to be irresolvable. I cannot resolve it Moore's way, by examples. But it is not obvious what other way, if any, is available to me.

Is it really possible that no physical objects exist? Well, can't we imagine that no such objects exist, and doesn't this show that their non-existence

is possible? This is the key question addressed in the diagnostic phase of Wittgenstein's argument. Here is what he has to say:

But can't it be imagined that there are no physical objects? I don't know. And yet 'There are physical objects' is nonsense. Is it supposed to be an empirical proposition? . . .

And is *this* an empirical proposition: 'There seem to be physical objects'?

'A is a physical object' is a piece of instruction which we give only to someone who doesn't understand what 'A' means, or 'what physical object' means. Thus it is instruction about the use of words, and 'physical object' is a logical concept. (Like colour, quantity, . . .) And that is why no such proposition as: 'There are physical objects' can be formulated.

Yet we encounter such unsuccessful shots at every turn.

(OC 35–6)

We have identified the proximate source of the illusion of the doubt behind everyday doubt. The idealist or sceptic wants to treat 'There are physical objects' as an empirical or factual statement. He wants to treat it as a hypothesis. It is neither. However, this is not because, as the Framework Reading has it, that it is a 'framework judgement', lying apart from the route travelled by enquiry, beyond evidence and justification, and non-factual because neither true nor false. 'There are physical objects' is neither true nor false because it is nonsense. And it is nonsense because 'physical object' is not the concept of a kind of object, like 'unicorn' or 'planet'. 'Physical object' is a piece of logical or semantic vocabulary, thus unsuitable for formulating the empirical hypothesis the sceptic or idealist would like to express.

Wittgenstein does not elaborate, but the main drift of his thought is clear. We do not have a general-purpose concept of 'object' that swings free of our ability to refer to objects in the course of playing particular language-games. Rather, our understanding of 'objects' is implicit in our mastery of singular reference. In other words, 'objects' are what singular terms pick out. Central to our mastery of singular reference are practices of identification and re-identification: we know what an object is when we know what does and does not count as the same object. These practices of identification and re-identification sort 'objects' into broad logical categories. The criteria for being the same chair as the one I saw at the auction yesterday are different from those for being the same shade of grey as the one on the walls of my office. Someone familiar with particular practices of identifying and re-identifying can be taught to recognise these broad logical divisions ('physical object', 'colour', 'quantity'), and this can short-circuit the teaching of future words. This is why no such proposition as 'There are physical objects' can be formulated. At most it could mean 'We talk about tables, chairs, dogs, cats, etc.' This is not at all what the realist intends to assert or the idealist to deny.<sup>3</sup>

There are echoes of Carnap here, but with a difference. No philosopher inclined to wonder whether there are *really* such things as numbers will be satisfied with a demonstration that there are two prime numbers between six and twelve, so that at least two such things are known to exist. This parallels the case of the idealist or sceptic, who will reject Moore's assurances with respect to the existence of his hands. The sceptic or idealist wants to make an 'external' claim about certain referential practices considered as a whole. But the only such claims we can make are semantic, describing the games we play. (This is calculating; and this is talking about 'physical objects'.) There is no vantage point from which we could find these games metaphysically wanting (or see playing them as a practical decision).

It is important to take note of the special character of this diagnosis. Not all propositions that lie apart from the route travelled by enquiry do so for the same reason. To see this, consider another proposition much discussed by Wittgenstein in the later sets of notes: 'The earth has existed for many years past'. No one who doubted this proposition could engage in historical investigation or seek historical understanding. The same goes for the proposition that not all historical records are the product of fraud or deception. All our discursive practices involve such (typically tacit) commitments. They constitute the 'riverbed' along which enquiry flows (OC 95–9), the axis around which enquiry moves (OC 152), or the hinges on which it turns (OC 341–3).

Is 'There are physical objects' a hinge proposition, only more general than hinges specific to history or physics because common to all such enquiries?<sup>24</sup> No. 'There are physical objects' is not a hinge proposition: it is nonsense.

We learn to think by learning to talk; and we learn to talk by being trained to make particular judgements about things around us. It is therefore inconceivable that there should be discursive beings who had not mastered 'physical-object' talk. For more specialised kinds of talk, this is not so. Wittgenstein writes:

[W]hat goes into someone's knowing. . . history, say? He must know what it means to say: the earth has already existed for such and such a length of time. For not *any* intelligent adult must know that . . .  
(OC 85)

. . . Men have believed that they could make rain. Why should not a king be brought up in the belief that the world began with him? . . .  
(OC 92)

A definite conception of historical time belongs to what we take as common sense. But not everything that belongs to common sense is a precondition of the very possibility of rational thought. This confirms what I have claimed. Wittgenstein's response to idealism, the problem addressed in Moore's

‘Proof’, must be distinguished from his discussion of Moore’s ‘Defense’, which raises very different issues.

### 3 The therapeutic phase

The source of the idea of a doubt behind the doubt has been identified and exposed as a piece of conceptual confusion. We might therefore suppose that Wittgenstein’s argument is complete. This is not how Wittgenstein sees things.

But is it an adequate answer to the scepticism of the idealist, or the assurances of the realist, to say that: ‘There are physical objects’ is nonsense? For them after all it is not nonsense. It would, however, be an answer to say: this assertion, or its opposite, is a misfiring attempt to express what can’t be expressed like that. And that it does misfire can be shown; but that isn’t the end of the matter. We need to realise that what presents itself to us as the first expression of a difficulty, or of its solution, may as yet not be correctly expressed at all. Just as one who has a just censure of a picture to make will often at first offer the censure where it does not belong, and an investigation is needed in order to find the right point of attack for the critic.

(OC 37)

This passage marks the transition from the diagnostic to the therapeutic phase of the argument. Let me note, however, that I am using ‘diagnostic’ and ‘therapeutic’ as convenient markers for two phases of Wittgenstein’s argument. I do not mean to suggest any deep methodological distinction. On the contrary, as paragraph 37 makes clear, Wittgenstein’s therapy will depend on further diagnosis.

Why is it an inadequate answer to the idealist and the realist to say that ‘There are physical objects’ is nonsense? In saying that it is not nonsense ‘to them’, Wittgenstein is not saying that it is not nonsense. Nor is he conceding that the idealist and realist have given it a sense: not a clear sense, anyway. The point is rather that these philosophers – all of us when we are in the grip of sceptical anxieties – will not recognise that it is nonsense. They (or we) think that ‘There are physical objects’ can be understood as an empirical hypothesis. They (we) suffer from an illusion of meaning, the source of which remains to be exposed.

The realist wants to say something correct: that there is nothing defective in the confident way we talk about tables and chairs and rocks and trees. But one cannot make this point by insisting that, contrary to the sceptic or idealist, there really are physical objects out there, as one might insist that there really are mountains on the Moon. (They are not just a trick of the light.)

The realist's way of asserting the legitimacy of everyday talk about physical objects misfires: it uses logical vocabulary to make what is intended to be an empirical claim about the world beyond language. This much, Wittgenstein thinks, has been shown. But this is not the end of the matter because the confusion that has been identified is not gratuitous, not the result of mere blindness to the contours of the conceptual landscape. Rather, our confusion is induced by ideas that have yet to come into view. Until we have identified these ideas, we will not have found the right point of attack.

Wittgenstein never tells us in so many words what he takes the right point of attack to be. But I think we can identify it with some confidence. Wittgenstein begins his diagnostic investigation by returning to knowledge in mathematics:

Knowledge in mathematics: Here one has to keep on reminding oneself of the unimportance of the 'inner process' or 'state'.... What is important is how we *use* mathematical propositions.

(OC 38)

What sort of proposition is this: 'We *cannot* have miscalculated in  $12 \times 12 = 144$ '? It must surely be a proposition of logic.—But now doesn't it come to the same, as the statement  $12 \times 12 = 144$ ?

If you demand a rule from which it follows that there can't have been a miscalculation here, the answer is that we did not learn this through a rule, but by learning to calculate.

We got to know the *nature* of calculation by learning to calculate.

(OC 43–5)

To learn to calculate at all, hence to learn what calculating is, we must be trained to accept certain calculations as (normally) unquestionable. Someone who was in doubt as to whether  $12 \times 12 = 144$  would not have learned to calculate. He would not know what calculating is and would not understand arithmetical statements. As Wittgenstein explains in some later remarks:

The *truth* of my statements is the test of my understanding of these statements.

That is to say: if I make certain false statements, it becomes uncertain whether I understand them.

(OC 80–1)<sup>5</sup>

And although there is no rule for distinguishing those cases in which error is impossible from those in which it isn't, this is not a lack: 'The rule is not needed'.

(OC 46)

The possibility of making or even imagining a mistake is severely constrained by the demands of making sense at all. This is a ‘logical’ point. However, we should not misunderstand this characterisation.

What sort of proposition is: ‘What could a mistake here be like?’? It would have to be a proposition of logic. But it is a logic that is not used, because what it tells us is not learned through propositions. –It is a logical proposition, for it does describe the conceptual (linguistic) situation.

(OC 51)

Wittgenstein’s ‘logic’ simply describes how judgements of various kinds are made, though even then not in a way that reduces our practical know-how to strict rules. Accordingly, logic does not guide our practices. Nor does it justify them. It is not their foundation. Nevertheless, logical investigation reveals something of great significance for scepticism. Wittgenstein comes to the point:

The situation is thus not the same for a proposition like ‘At this distance from the sun there is a planet’ and ‘Here is a hand’ (namely my own hand). The second can’t be called a hypothesis. But there isn’t a sharp boundary line between them.

So one might grant that Moore was right, if he is interpreted like this: a proposition saying that here is a physical object may have the same logical status as one saying that here is a red patch.

(OC 52–3)

Here we find the right point of attack. The reason why sceptic and idealist think that ‘There are physical objects’ is a hypothesis is that they are convinced that experiential knowledge – knowledge of coloured patches or ‘sense-data’ – is epistemologically prior to knowledge of physical objects. In fact, in their view, experiential knowledge is epistemologically basic: knowledge of sense-data is distinctive in its immediacy, certainty and immunity from error. In reporting on our sense-data, we can perhaps make verbal slips, but we cannot make mistakes. With this doctrine in place, judgements about physical objects look to be inferential. Perhaps our sense-data arise in deviant ways, as they would if we were victims of the Evil Deceiver or brains-in-vats. The commitment to the existence of physical objects looks like an empirical hypothesis: a particular explanation of the origin of our sense-data. How we might justify this ‘hypothesis’ is obscure.

Within the constraints of the doctrine of the priority of experience, Moore’s proof is a total failure. But Moore may have been on to something: there is no reason to accept the doctrine. Immunity from error, across a wide range of cases, is a feature of language-use as such.

For it is not true that a mistake merely gets more and more improbable as we pass from the planet to my own hand. No: at some point it has ceased to be conceivable.

This is already suggested by the following: if it were not so, it would also be conceivable that we should be wrong in every statement about physical objects; that any we ever make are mistaken.

(OC 54)

Sense-datum talk and physical-object talk are no different in this respect: they can have the same logical status. Taking this point to heart, we strike at the source of the feeling that 'There are physical objects' is a (risky) hypothesis. As this feeling fades, we can come to see the realist's 'hypothesis' for the nonsense it is.

The sceptic will resist this argument. Because it is logically possible that 'things around us' do not really exist, which is inconceivable in the case of colours, there is a potential sceptical problem about external objects for which sense-data offer no counterpart. It follows that our knowledge of sense-data is intrinsically certain, in a way that knowledge of tables and chairs can never be.

Wittgenstein anticipates this response.

So is the hypothesis possible, that all things around us don't exist? Would not that be like the hypothesis of our having miscalculated in all our calculations?

(OC 55)

It would, which means that the 'argument from differential certainty' presents no new considerations. In fact, the argument assumes what it offers to prove: that sense-datum knowledge is privileged. Only given this assumption can we seem to ourselves to understand 'There are physical objects' as a (quite possibly false) hypothesis. But sense-datum judgements enjoy no special immunity from doubt. Rather, limitations on the intelligibility of error are a pervasive feature of discursive practice. Whether we are calculating, asking someone to fetch a chair, or pointing out a colour, in the right circumstances error is inconceivable.

A further factor in our feeling that talking about tables and chairs reflects commitment to a hypothesis is the assumption that we have an all-purpose concept of 'existence' whose application is clear in any context whatsoever (this parallels the mistake about the concept of an 'object'). Thinking along these lines, we might be tempted to argue: 'You know what physical objects are – tables, chairs, things like that – and you know what 'exist' means; so you understand the claim that physical objects might not exist'. Naturally, Wittgenstein regards this as another illusion.

When one says ‘Perhaps this planet doesn’t exist and the light-phenomenon arises in some other way’, then after all one needs an example of an object which does exist. This doesn’t exist, . . . as for example does. . .

(OC 56)

Of course, the idealist has an example. The table, which I seem to see, does not exist, as for example does the table-shaped brown patch (sense-datum). But what contrast is implied here? The sense-datum exists in a special way: it is immediately present to consciousness. And what is the hallmark of this immediate presence? That mistakes are inconceivable? We are getting nowhere. Logical investigation shows no trace of the epistemic cleavage between sense-datum judgements and judgements about physical objects. Rather, wherever we look, we find doubt gradually losing its sense. That is simply how things are: ‘The language-game just *is* like that’ (OC 56).

#### 4 The diagnosis completed

Wittgenstein’s argument is still not complete. The idea that knowledge of sense-data is epistemologically basic cannot be read off our ordinary way of doing things. To the contrary, it is in tension with the logic of ordinary epistemic practices. So what is the source of its appeal? Wittgenstein’s answer to this question is not given in his first set of notes, though the ground is prepared there.

As we saw, Wittgenstein thinks that one of the pitfalls of Moore’s attempt to enumerate things he knows is that his performance seems to reveal ‘a queer and extremely important mental state’. Thus:

... ‘I know’ seems to describe a state of affairs which guarantees what is known, guarantees it as a fact. One always forgets the expression ‘I thought I knew’.

(OC 12)

‘Know’ is factive: ‘I know that there is a hand in front of me’ entails ‘There is a hand in front of me’. At the same time, avowals of one’s current mental state have a special authority. In normal circumstances, a sincere avowal that I believe so-and-so is criterial for my believing it. You might on occasion question my sincerity but you would not, except perhaps in very special circumstances, suspect me of being mistaken. Normally, from my saying ‘I believe so-and-so’ you can infer that I that I do indeed believe so-and-so. According to Wittgenstein, Moore’s performance involves acting as if the same were true of knowledge.

Moore's view really comes down to this: the concept 'know' is analogous to the concepts 'believe', 'surmise', 'doubt', 'be convinced' in that the statement 'I know . . .' can't be a mistake. And if that is so, then there can be an inference from such an utterance to the truth of an assertion. And here the form 'I thought I knew' is being overlooked . . .

(OC 21)

Wittgenstein thinks that the way to avoid Moore's misstep is to resist thinking of knowledge as a 'mental state':

One can say 'He believes it, but it isn't so', but not 'He knows it, but it isn't so'. Does this stem from the difference between the mental states of belief and of knowledge? No. . . . One may for example call 'mental state' what is expressed by tone of voice in speaking, by gestures etc. It would thus be possible to speak of a mental state of conviction, and that may be the same whether it is knowledge or false belief . . .

(OC 42)

If 'mental states' are such that a special epistemic authority attaches to avowals or first-person reports of them, knowledge is not a mental state. Knowing is not a matter of a claimant's mental state but of his (or his claim's) epistemic status: for example, whether or not the evidence backs him (it) up. And epistemic status is impersonal and public. There is nothing subjective about it.

That is the problem. If one thinks of knowledge as a mental state, thus as subjective, while recognising that 'know' is factive, one will suppose that a subjective or inner state can ensure that certain facts really do obtain. But how can a subjective state guarantee objective facts? It cannot. Thus, one is led to the view that the only facts that can be known, or 'immediately' known, are themselves subjective: facts about other mental states. Wittgenstein explains:

'I know' has a primitive meaning similar to and related to 'I see' ('wissen', 'videre'). And 'I knew he was in the room, but he wasn't in the room' is like 'I saw him in the room, but he wasn't there'. 'I know' is meant to express a relation, not between me and the sense of a proposition (like 'I believe') but between me and a fact. So that the *fact* is taken into my consciousness. (Here is the reason why one wants to say that nothing that goes on in the outer world is really known, but only what happens in the domain of what are called sense-data.) This would give us a picture of knowing as the percep-

tion of an outer event through visual rays which project it as it is into the eye and the consciousness. Only then the question at once arises whether one can be *certain* of the projection. And this picture does indeed show how our *imagination* presents knowledge, but not what lies at the bottom of this presentation.

(OC 90)

What lies at the bottom of this presentation is the idea of knowledge as a ‘mental state’. This idea is perhaps the sceptic’s most dangerous illusion.

Wittgenstein closes the circle by returning to the point from which his argument took off: the peculiarity of Moore’s performance in ‘proving’ the existence of an external world. It now turns out that the misuse of ‘know’ involved in Moore’s attempt to answer the sceptic encourages or reflects the very conceptual misunderstandings from which sceptical doubts derive their power. Dialectically, this is a brilliant move. But it is also diagnostically profound.

The idea of a doubt behind ordinary doubt depends, in the last analysis, on the doctrine of the priority of experience over knowledge of the worldly objects. But the sceptic understands this doctrine in a very peculiar way. As I like to say, the sceptic is an epistemological realist: constraints on justification are not rooted in norms that we impose (and might modify) but are derived from the natural order of reasons, an order that holds independently of human artifice or convention.<sup>6</sup>

On the face of it, this is a strange metaphysical view. The doctrine of the epistemic priority of experience is normative: it is about what sorts of claims need to be supported by what sorts of evidence, if they are to amount to knowledge. But it is not easy for the sceptic to present it in this light for, so presented, it is apt to look like an imposition and a far from obviously reasonable one at that. Accordingly, the sceptic proceeds as though the doctrine were enforced by the epistemological facts. Judgements about the external world must be supported by experience – knowledge of one’s own sense-data – because in the last analysis such experiential knowledge is all we have to work with. That is just how things are; that we are condemned to work outwards from (subjective) experience is simply our epistemic situation, which appears on reflection to be a predicament. In any event, the priority of experience is not a justificational ideal that the sceptic imposes, but rather a constraint inherent in the human condition. Scepticism thus appears as a surprising *discovery*.

The imaginative picture that Wittgenstein describes shows how one might be an epistemological realist. Gripped by the idea of knowledge as a fact-guaranteeing mental state, we think that the reach of our capacity to guarantee the facts sets an outer boundary to what we can (immediately) know. In this picture, the limitation on our epistemic resources does not appear as a normative constraint but as a quasi-psychological limitation intrinsic to the

process by which knowledge must be obtained. Unfortunately, thus pictured, the process is one whose reliability we will never be able to guarantee.

If we break with the idea of knowledge as a queer mental state, we can break with the sceptic's epistemological realism. This is what Wittgenstein wants us to do. The alternative to epistemological realism is a pragmatic view of norms. The normative structure of doubting and justifying is implicit in practices of enquiry which, as human institutions, are subject to change. There is no immutable order of reasons for the sceptic to discover or exploit. Reminders to the effect that the rules of our language-games, thus the epistemic constraints implicit in those games, are not wholly beyond our control recur in Wittgenstein's refutation of idealism.

Whether a proposition can turn out true or false after all depends on what I make count as determinants for that proposition.

(OC 5)

... [O]ut of a host of calculations certain ones might be designated as reliable once and for all, others as not yet fixed. . .

... But . . . this is only a decision for a practical purpose.

(OC 48–9)

It is, I think, significant that Wittgenstein's first set of notes ends with a reminder that our language-games are to some degree malleable. Our language-games change as our conception of the world changes.

... A meaning of a word is a kind of employment of it.

For it is what we learn when the word is incorporated into our language.

That is why there exists a correspondence between the concepts 'rule' and 'meaning'.

If we imagine the facts otherwise than as they are, certain language-games lose some of their importance, while others become important. And in this way, there is an alteration – a gradual one – in the use of the vocabulary of the language.

(OC 61–3)

When language-games change, then there is change in concepts, and with concepts the meanings of words change.

(OC 65)

With such changes go changes in the normative epistemic structure of our games: the doubts that we recognise as reasonable (or even intelligible), what we may or must take for granted, and so on. As I read Wittgenstein, it

is clear why he ends on this note. Epistemological realism, the idea of an immutable order of reasons, is scepticism's ultimate source; and the pragmatic conception of norms, implicit in the idea of meaning as use, shows how we can refuse to accede to it.

### Notes

- 1 It is worth remembering that the paragraph numbers of *OC* were introduced by the editors. They are not Wittgenstein's.
- 2 I hope that the Framework Reading is not completely unrecognisable. Variants of it can be found in important studies of *On Certainty* by Marie McGinn and Avrum Stroll, as well as in some writings of Crispin Wright. See McGinn 1989, Stroll 1994 and Wright 1985.
- 3 My take on this aspect of Wittgenstein's argument owes a lot to Robert Brandom's discussion of referring to objects in Brandom 1994 (see p. 360f).
- 4 Wright 1985: 455. Wright is careful to distinguish general commitments from hinges as contextually-specific certainties, such as 'I have two hands' (assumed in normal circumstances). Nevertheless, he advocates a uniform treatment for 'There is a material world' and 'The earth has existed for many years past'. This is just what Wittgenstein repudiates.
- 5 Notice that this argument depends on a straightforward attribution of truth to Moorean judgements. At the same time, Wittgenstein is tempted to deny that propositions belonging to the 'background' of enquiry are properly thought of as true or false. To go into this issue would take me too far afield. Let me just say what I take to be the source of Wittgenstein's hesitation: he is torn between a deflationary view of truth (in the form of a redundancy theory) and an epistemic account (the true/false as what we can confirm/disconfirm). What these two approaches to truth have in common is that on neither can we explain why certain proposition 'stand fast' by saying that they 'correspond to reality'. Incidentally, Wittgenstein is entitled to adopt deflationism. The argument connecting truth and meaning anticipates some well-known views of Davidson. *Pace* Davidson, these views are compatible with a deflationary conception of truth. See Williams 1999.
- 6 See Williams 1996.

## VARIETIES OF SCEPTICISM

*James Conant*

Much of this chapter is devoted to offering a partial taxonomy of various kinds of philosophical scepticism and the various kinds of philosophical response those scepticisms have engendered.<sup>1</sup> The aim of the taxonomic exercise is to furnish a perspicuous overview of some of the dialectical relations that obtain across the range of problems that philosophers have called (and continue to call) ‘sceptical’.<sup>2</sup> I will argue that such an overview affords a number of forms of philosophical insight. The final three sections of the chapter employ the taxonomy developed in the first part of the chapter to show how some of Wittgenstein’s finest commentators have misunderstood one another’s work by failing to command a clear overview of the philosophical terrain here.

### 1 **Cartesian and Kantian varieties of scepticism – a first pass at the distinction**

The partial taxonomy presented in this chapter flows from an initial distinction between two varieties of scepticism which I will call *Cartesian scepticism* and *Kantian scepticism*<sup>3</sup> (these labels are admittedly contentious and will be discussed further below). Each of these varieties of scepticism has its origin in a sceptical question (which I will call ‘the *Cartesian question*’ and ‘the *Kantian question*’ respectively); and each of these varieties of sceptical question leads to a sceptical paradox (‘the *Cartesian paradox*’ and ‘the *Kantian paradox*’). I will call the imaginary philosopher who acquiesces in the Cartesian paradox ‘a *Cartesian sceptic*’, and the (even more) imaginary philosopher who acquiesces in the Kantian paradox ‘a *Kantian sceptic*’. The customary response to each of these paradoxes is to seek a way to entitle oneself to do something other than acquiesce in the paradoxical conclusion, by refuting or dissolving or diagnosing or by-passing the paradox in question. This gives rise to two varieties of philosophical problematic, flowing from such attempts to address each of these two sorts of sceptic, that I will call ‘the *Cartesian problematic*’ and ‘the *Kantian problematic*’ respectively. It is with these twin problematics that I will be primarily concerned here and which I will be discussing and refer-

ring to as ‘varieties of scepticism’. According to this unconventional idiom, the term ‘scepticism’ (and its variants, such as ‘Cartesian scepticism’ or ‘Kantian scepticism’) therefore refers not just to one particular sort of philosophical *position* (i.e. that held by one or another sort of sceptic) but rather to the wider *dialectical space* within which philosophers occupying a range of apparently opposed philosophical positions (such as ‘realism’, ‘idealism’, ‘coherentism’, etc.) engage one another, while seeking a stable way to answer the sceptic’s question in the affirmative rather than (as the sceptic himself does) in the negative.<sup>4</sup> So, according to the terminology I am here introducing, a philosopher can be concerned with the Cartesian sceptical problematic without himself being a Cartesian sceptic; and, indeed, Descartes was such a philosopher. And the same holds for the relation between being concerned with the Kantian sceptical problematic, being a Kantian sceptic and being Kant.

The following is an excerpt from the classic formulation of the Cartesian problematic:

How often, asleep at night, am I convinced of just such familiar events – that I am here in my dressing-gown, sitting by the fire – when in fact I am lying undressed in bed! Yet at the moment my eyes are certainly wide awake when I look at this piece of paper; I shake my head and it is not asleep; as I stretch out and feel my hand I do so deliberately, and I know what I am doing. All this would not happen with such distinctness to someone asleep. Indeed! As if I did not remember other occasions when I have been tricked by exactly similar thoughts while asleep! As I think about this more carefully, I see plainly that there are never any sure signs by means of which being awake can be distinguished from being asleep. . . . Suppose then that I am dreaming, and that these particulars – that my eyes are open, that I am moving my head and stretching out my hands – are not true. Perhaps, indeed, I do not even have such hands or such a body at all.

(Descartes 1986 (1641): 13)

I wish to contrast the sceptical problematic which figures in the above passage with the one which figures in the following excerpt from Kant:

The *a priori* conditions of a possible experience in general are at the same conditions of the possibility of objects of experience. Now I maintain that the categories . . . are nothing but the conditions of thought in a possible experience. . . . [A]nd without such unity . . . no thoroughgoing, universal, and therefore necessary, unity of consciousness would be met with in the manifold of perceptions. These perceptions would not then belong to any experience, consequently

would be without an object, merely a blind play of representations, less even than a dream.

(Kant 1961 (1781/1787): A112)

The problematic of the first of these passages centres on how to distinguish between dreaming that one is experiencing something and *actually* experiencing it. The problematic of the second of these passages centres on what it takes to be able to *dream* that one is experiencing something. That is to say, the second of these two problematics focuses on the conditions of the possibility of something that the first problematic takes for granted. I take the (apparent) difference here to be a consequential one.

The most familiar way of formulating the contrast between these two problematics is as one of *knowledge vs. the conditions of knowledge*. Thus, one is often told something along the following lines: the Cartesian wants to arrive at knowledge; the Kantian wants to arrive at the ground of the possibility of knowledge. But what does that mean? There are lots of ways of unpacking this contrast. I will briefly indicate a few of the different points upon which the accent can fall in an unpacking of this contrast, though I would suggest that these apparently distinct formulations can be seen, in the end, to come to the same thing:

- 1 Actuality vs. possibility. Cartesian scepticism takes the possibility of experience for granted; its question has to do with *actuality*. Hence the importance of the word ‘real’ in Cartesian formulations of the sceptical problematic: are things *really* as they seem? Kantian scepticism brings within the scope of its worry that which the Cartesian sceptic takes for granted: that experience possesses the requisite unity so much as to be able to be about something. Hence the importance of the word ‘possible’ in Kantian formulations of the sceptical problematic: how is experience (so much as) *possible*?
- 2 *Being* so vs. being *so*.<sup>5</sup> Cartesian scepticism calls into question the *being* of that which is disclosed by experience; Kantian scepticism calls into question the *intelligibility* of experience. The Cartesian problematic is concerned with the question: how can I know that things *are* as they seem? Hence the worry in the Cartesian problematic focuses on an inferential step from appearance *to* reality. The Kantian problematic is concerned with the question: how can things so much as *seem* to be a certain way? Hence the worry in the Kantian problematic focuses on the conditions of the possibility of the kind of *unity* presupposed by the Cartesian (i.e. that which the Cartesian seeks to infer *from*): what sort of unity must characterise a ‘play of presentations’ for it to be more than ‘merely blind play’, for it to possess the aspect of offering *appearances* – for it to possess the character of being *of* an object.
- 3 Truth vs. objective purport. The Cartesian wants to know which of his

thoughts are true, which of his experiences are veridical. The Cartesian sceptic therefore worries about the transition from a sensory experience to a judgement, from a thought to (what Frege calls) its truth-value. Hence the Cartesian problematic inquires into the grounds of truth: given that this is what we are inclined to judge, do we know that we judge truthfully in so judging? The Kantian sceptic seems to deprive us of the resources for so much as being able to enjoy an experience (waking or dreaming), for so much as being able to frame a thought (true or false). The Kantian problematic inquires into the grounds of the possibility of being able to enjoy an experience, entertain a thought-content. The Kantian asks: what does it take to have thoughts that are vulnerable to how things are? The Kantian problematic is concerned, in the first instance, not with truth but with what it is to stick your neck out in thinking, with what Kant calls the *objective validity* of judgement (the possibility of something's being a candidate for truth or falsehood) – with what I will henceforth call the *objective purport* of judgement.

I will briefly indicate here a few of the guises in which Cartesian and Kantian problematics surface across a number of (supposedly distinct) 'areas' of philosophy:

- 1 Philosophy of perception. This is the most classic instance of each of these varieties of sceptical problematic. The Cartesian sceptic asks: how can I *know* things are as my senses present them as being? Is there *really* an external world? I am having an experience of a certain sort (say, that I am here in my dressing-gown, sitting by the fire) but how can I know that things are as my experience presents them as being? The case under consideration is a *best case of knowledge*,<sup>6</sup> and yet there still seems to be room for the question: how can I know that I am not, in fact, lying undressed in my bed dreaming that I am here in my dressing-gown, sitting by the fire? The Cartesian paradox thus takes the following form: if I don't know *this*, then how can I be said to know anything? Why should I ever trust the testimony of my senses? Should I ever endorse the appearances with which my senses present me? The gap the Cartesian seeks to bridge is from his own mind to the outer world. The paradox lies in our apparent inability to answer the following question: how can I penetrate the veil of sensory ideas and attain a view of what is really happening outside of my mind? The Kantian sceptic is preoccupied by different questions: how can my senses so much as *present* things as being a certain way? How can my experience so much as be intelligibly *of* an external world? The Kantian problematic is focused on the problem how the senses must be so as to be able to furnish testimony. What sort of unity must experience possess in order to be able to present an appearance about which the question could arise 'Shall I endorse it?' How am I

so much as able to enjoy an experience that possesses a determinate world-directed content (say, that I am here in my dressing-gown, sitting by the fire)? The Kantian paradox lies in its coming to seem a mystery how what impinges on my senses could so much as *appear* to be revelatory of the world. The gap the Kantian seeks to overcome is from sensory blindness to sensory consciousness – from a form of sensibility upon which things merely causally impinge to one upon which things impress themselves as being thus and so.

- 2 The problem of other minds. The Cartesian version of this problem goes like this: The person before me is acting for all the world as if he were in pain, but how can I *know* that he is in pain. Is he pretending? Or is he *really* in pain? The Cartesian paradox here takes the form: if I don't know *this*, how can I ever be said to know what someone else is feeling? The Cartesian problematic here is focused on the problem of how to underwrite the testimony of the human body. The gap the Cartesian seeks to bridge here is from the other's outer bodily movements to his inner states. This version of the Cartesian sceptic asks: how can I penetrate the screen of the other's body and attain a view of what is really happening inside the other himself? This version of the Kantian sceptic is again preoccupied by a different question: how can the human body so much as seem to *express* a mental state? The Kantian paradox here lies in its coming to seem a mystery how an expanse of fleshy matter could so much as *appear* to be revelatory of an inner life. The Kantian problematic here is focused on the question: how does the human body even seem to furnish a *picture* of the human soul? The gap the Kantian seeks to overcome here is from an inexpressive physical entity to an animated field of human expression – from a psychologically-neutral locus of bodily movements to the communicative body of a palpably suffering, desiring, pondering human being.
- 3 Philosophy of language. The Cartesian version of this problem goes like this: how can I *know* that my interpretation of something (a text, an utterance, a sign-post) is correct? How can I be sure that this is what is *really* meant? I know how this sort of sign-post (in the shape, say, of a pointing arrow) is usually to be interpreted, but how do I know that my interpretation in this case is the right interpretation? But if I don't know *this*, how can I ever be said to know what something means? The gap that the Cartesian seeks to bridge here is between his understanding of the meaning of a sign and what the sign actually means. This version of the Cartesian sceptic asks: how can I penetrate the penumbra of interpretation and attain a view of the meaning itself? This version of the Kantian sceptic again is preoccupied by a different question: how can a sequence of marks or noises so much as seem to *mean* something? The Kantian paradox here lies in its coming to seem a mystery how a mere sequence of dead signs could so much as *appear* to be alive with

significance. The Kantian problematic here is focused on the question: how does a linguistic performance acquire the physiognomy of meaning? What sort of unity must a linguistic performance possess in order to appear to be the sort of thing about which the question could arise ‘Is this what it means?’ The gap the Kantian seeks to overcome here is from meaningless sequences of marks and noises to determinate expressions of thought – from a semantically neutral concatenation of scratches or sounds to a legible field of intelligible meanings.

In any area of philosophy in which one finds one of these two varieties of scepticism, one generally also finds the other. This is not to deny that in some areas of philosophy one of these problematics may come to seem more gripping or otherwise deserving of interest than the other. I would want to argue, however, that wherever one of these sorts of scepticism is possible, the other is also possible. (The fact that these same problematics can and often do surface in virtually every so-called ‘area’ of philosophy is itself a ground for wondering whether philosophy is usefully divided into separate ‘areas’ of enquiry as so many nowadays are prone to suppose.) Examples of these varieties of scepticism arise in ethics, aesthetics, philosophy of law, philosophy of mind, philosophy of science, philosophy of mathematics, etc.;<sup>7</sup> but the foregoing three pairs of cases should suffice for the purpose of furnishing a preliminary overview of the twin problematics that I am seeking to isolate here.

This brings us to the first form of philosophical insight that a perspicuous overview of various kinds of scepticism affords. It allows one to command a clearer view of the sorts of relations of symmetry and asymmetry that obtain among variants within a single variety of scepticism. If one commands a clear view of the homology of structure exhibited, for example, across the three variants of Cartesian or Kantian scepticism mentioned above, then one puts oneself in a position to bring resources derived in the consideration of one of these variants to bear on the consideration of others. It is quite remarkable, for example, how many a philosopher today is clear that, whatever else she wants to do in philosophy, she wants to find a way to resist the Cartesian assumption in the philosophy of perception that all perception of external objects requires an inference from how things seem to how things are. She wants to avoid such an assumption because she realises she will then be saddled with a Cartesian gap (leaving herself sealed inside her own mind, unable to claw her way back out to an unobstructed glimpse of the external world). Yet this same philosopher, when she turns, say, to the philosophy of language yields to the corresponding Cartesian temptation without a pang – finding utterly innocent the assumption that all understanding presupposes interpretation – thus saddling herself with a gap of a homologous sort (leaving herself sealed within a horizon of interpretations, unable way to claw her way back out to an unobstructed grasp of the meaning of an expression).

## 2 On the labels ‘Cartesian’, ‘Kantian’ and ‘scepticism’

There is much that any conscientious historian of philosophy will find to object to in my choosing to attach these labels to each of these varieties of scepticism: does not (what I am calling) Cartesian scepticism antedate Descartes?; is not the issue of scepticism a sideshow in Descartes’ philosophy and hence of relatively minor importance (compared with other things – say, the new science, or the quarrel with the Church) for an understanding of Descartes’ work as a whole?; is not Kant more Cartesian than I suggest he is?; is not scepticism equally a sideshow in Kant’s larger endeavour?; and what about Hume? Such objections are directed at the aptness of these labels, and it would be a mistake to think that the integrity of this project (of distinguishing the varieties of scepticism I choose to label ‘Cartesian’ and ‘Kantian’) is much threatened by such objections. Such objections speak only to the question whether I wouldn’t be better advised to relabel the varieties of scepticism with which I am here concerned. For the most part, such historical qualms will have to go unaddressed here though I will indicate briefly how I view two.

First, it is quite true that Descartes himself never poses most of the sceptical worries that I will be calling variants of ‘Cartesian scepticism’ (indeed, it is arguable that he only ever clearly poses one of them – namely, scepticism about the external world). And, though Kant arguably explores more of the possible variants of (what I will be calling) ‘Kantian scepticism’, he seems to be quite oblivious to some of them. Thus, in claiming that the philosophical problems I mention below represent variants of Cartesian and Kantian scepticism respectively, I am not making an historical claim about which problems are (and are not) discussed in the writings of Descartes or Kant. Rather, I am making a philosophical claim about a congruence to be found in the shape of the problems themselves, regardless of whose writings they appear in.

Second, the aptness of these labels for the purposes of distinguishing the two varieties of scepticism at issue here does not turn on any claim to the effect that an interest in the other problematic (i.e. the one that does not bear the author’s name) is absent from the writings of either Descartes or Kant. So it does not imply a denial that Kant was interested in Cartesian scepticism. In fact, Kant addresses a variant of Cartesian scepticism (he calls it ‘problematical idealism’) and seeks in ‘The Refutation of Idealism’ to show how the proper treatment of (what he himself calls) ‘scepticism’ contains as one of its corollaries the untenability of all such forms of idealism. Nor does it turn on a denial that there are incipient forms of a Kantian problematic to be found in Descartes’ writings (though I do not think that such a problematic ever comes fully into view in Descartes’ pages as a full-blown, self-standing variety of scepticism<sup>8</sup>). I denominate these problematics ‘Cartesian’ and ‘Kantian’ respectively, in order to mark not the point of their earliest

philosophical inception (the moment at which the seeds of the problematic first began to blossom philosophically) nor their last philosophical flicker of life (the moment past which they cease to have philosophical currency), but rather the historical moment at which within at least one of their variants their overall philosophical shape first became visible (the moment at which the problematic first reaches full philosophical flower).

Even if one is willing to waive these historical scruples, there still remain philosophical reasons why one might resist these labels. Thus, for example, it will seem to some philosophers perverse of me to use the term ‘scepticism’ in connection with what I am calling ‘Kantian scepticism’ precisely because of the ways in which it fails to exhibit some of the characteristic features of Cartesian scepticism. I purported, in originally furnishing ways one might unpack the difference between Cartesian and Kantian scepticism, to be offering various ways of unpacking the contrast between a problematic centred on *knowledge* and one centred on *the conditions of knowledge*. This way of putting the contrast makes it seem as if what were at issue were two forms of epistemological worry. As, however, should already be evident from the foregoing, this is quite misleading. It is, indeed, constitutive of the Cartesian problematic that it be clothed in epistemological form; its focus is on knowledge claims, bringing into question the relation between our knowledge claims and reality. What makes someone such-and-such a sort of Cartesian sceptic is that he is exercised by a *doubt* regarding whether we can have *knowledge* of such-and-such a sort. Given the internal relation between the concepts of doubt and knowledge, the Cartesian sceptic is quite aptly characterised as someone who *doubts*. What figures in the Cartesian problematic as a worry about the relation between knowledge claims and reality comes to look, however, from the vantage point of the Kantian problematic, like only an instance of a more general worry, a worry about the relation between *any* claim (true, false or fantastic) and reality. In making a claim at all, whether or not one thereby takes oneself to be knowledgeable, one makes oneself answerable to how things are. The Kantian asks: how is one able to accomplish this feat? The Kantian problematic is therefore only optionally clothed in epistemological form. It is, at its root, of a more general nature and the worry that exercises such a sceptic is misunderstood if it is taken to turn exclusively on matters having to do with knowledge. What comes into view in a Kantian problematic under the initial heading of ‘the conditions of the possibility of knowledge’ are the conditions of the possibility of mindedness as such. Kant himself, with some frequency, alternates between characterising the sorts of conditions at issue here as conditions of the possibility of knowledge and as conditions of the possibility of *experience*. (And he implies that they might equally aptly be characterised as, among other things, conditions of the possibility of objectively valid judgement, and conditions of the possibility of sensory consciousness of an object.) The Kantian sceptic is therefore only inaptly characterised as someone who suffers from a *doubt*.

This will seem to some philosophers to constitute a sufficient ground for insisting that what I am calling ‘a Kantian sceptic’ is not a kind of sceptic at all. So let me be clear on the following point: my aim here is never to legislate how the word ‘sceptic’ should be used, but only to illuminate some of the diverse ways in which philosophers, in fact, often use it – with the eventual aim of permitting the formulation of the following question: how are these various problematics (each of which is often called one of ‘scepticism’) related?<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, if one insists upon restricting the application of the term ‘scepticism’ to overtly epistemological contexts, one is going to be unable to track much that is at issue when the term is employed by Kant, by Wittgenstein, and (as the concluding sections of this chapter will demonstrate) by many contemporary philosophers. Consider, for example, the debate about the rule-following considerations and the threat of so-called *meaning scepticism*. What is often at issue in that debate is not just how one can *know* what something (or someone) means, but *how it is so much as possible* to mean anything at all. The term ‘scepticism’ in that debate often names the paradox that ensues if we cease to be able to make sense of the phenomenon in question as something that is so much as possible. What threatens to lapse here is not just our *epistemic access* to meaning but the *very possibility* of meaning. In reply to this, someone might want to insist that, if that is so, then that is a good reason for not employing the term ‘scepticism’ in the context of that debate. Perhaps so. My point, at the moment, is simply that if one wants to track how the term is often used by many philosophers, one needs to see that it sometimes ranges over philosophical contexts wider than the merely epistemological. This oscillation between a narrowly epistemological and a broader Kantian use of the term can make for many confusions; and it is natural to think the short way to avoid such confusions is to initiate an act of linguistic legislation that restricts the permissible use of the term. But it is too early in our enquiry to adjudicate how the use of the term ought to be restricted, if at all. In order to see how the term is best used, first we need to see more clearly how it is used and why it has come to admit of the variety of uses it presently does.

### 3 Some features of the Cartesian and Kantian genres of scepticism

In order to allow for a more fine-grained discrimination of these varieties of scepticism, I will now proceed to distinguish nine generic features of Cartesian and Kantian scepticism respectively.<sup>10</sup> But before I do this, let me caution that, as I employ the terms, ‘Cartesian scepticism’ and ‘Kantian scepticism’ denote *ideal types* of philosophical problematic that are instantiated with varying degrees of faithfulness in any given actual philosophical discussion. There are three dimensions of idealisation at work here.

The first dimension of idealisation lies in the idea that a fully realised

variant of, say, Cartesian scepticism will exhibit all nine of the mentioned features. It is an idealisation because most philosophical discussions that exhibit any one of the features (drawn from one of the two above lists of features) will not necessarily exhibit *all* of them (though it will probably exhibit many of them). Thus, it should be understood that, henceforth, when I speak of ‘a Cartesian problematic’, for example, I will mean a philosophical discussion that exhibits at least a large number of the Cartesian features specified below, but not necessarily all of them.<sup>11</sup>

The second dimension of idealisation concerns the way in which the presentation of these feature-spaces may appear to preclude the possibility of their overlap – to preclude an intermingling of Cartesian and Kantian features within a single philosophical problematic. That is both a desirable and a potentially misleading aspect of the presentation that follows. It is desirable in as much as it is part of my aim to illuminate something about the internal structure of each of these two (admittedly idealised) varieties of philosophical problematic. Each has its own logic. The co-occurrence of such features within a single philosophical discussion is generally (though not necessarily<sup>12</sup>) a symptom of philosophical confusion on the part of an author; and it is part of my purpose to facilitate the diagnosis and treatment of such forms of confusion. Nevertheless, it is potentially misleading because – even if, in a resolutely executed philosophical enquiry, Cartesian and Kantian features will tend to drive one another out – in the irresoluteness of actual philosophical practice, such features can often be found squashed up against one another. Borrowing some terms from Cavell’s theory of genre<sup>13</sup>, one might say that Kantian scepticism represents an *adjacent* genre of scepticism – one in which each of the features of Cartesian scepticism is *displaced*<sup>14</sup> in a certain way. And, just as different genres of film (say, a western and a romantic comedy) can be crossed with another – often (though not always) with aesthetically jarring results – so, too, these genres of scepticism can be crossed with another. In philosophy, when this happens, usually (though not always) it is a sign that the author is no longer clear which of these two philosophical problematics he wishes to inhabit.

The third dimension of idealisation concerns the presentation of each of the features as apparently distinct from at least most of the other eight. One reason for thus presenting them has already been indicated: If one reviews actual philosophical discussions some of these features will feature explicitly while others will not. So, by provisionally treating the features in question as apparently distinct, we equip ourselves with a classificatory scheme that can be applied more widely. Yet this raises a number of questions about how we are to understand the philosophical discussions we are thus classifying: are these features all really (as opposed to merely notationally) distinct? And, even where distinct, how independent are they? Is it perhaps the case that any philosophical discussion that explicitly bears some of them must

be implicitly entangled in a problematic that bears all of them? The initial presentation of these features as apparently distinct should not be taken to foreclose the possibility that the latter question is properly answered in the affirmative.

### *Cartesian genre*

With these cautionary remarks to be borne in mind, I will henceforth refer to the following nine generic features of the Cartesian genre of scepticism as *Cartesian features*:

- 1 The Cartesian investigation begins with and turns on the exploration of a certain sort of example – *a best case of knowledge*.
- 2 Such a case is shown to be vulnerable to *doubt*.
- 3 The conclusion *generalises* – we can move from a conclusion about this particular candidate item of knowledge to a general conclusion about all such items.
- 4 The investigation thereby issues in a *discovery*.
- 5 The investigation ends in a mood of *disappointment*.
- 6 The disappointment is born of the impossibility of showing how what we had taken to be possible could be *actual*.
- 7 It looks as if there is something *we cannot do*.
- 8 Our inability is the consequence of the existence of a *Cartesian gap* – a gap we seem to be unable to bridge.
- 9 The sceptical discovery cannot be converted into practice: it is *practically unstable* – yet we are obliged to live as if we could bridge the gap in question.

### *First feature*

To say that an exploration of the Cartesian problematic begins always with ‘a best case of knowledge’ is to say that it begins always with a carefully selected *example* – one that possesses (or at least appears able simultaneously to possess) at least the following four characteristics. First, the example must involve a *concrete claim* to know: a particular person, at a particular time and place must enter the claim. Second, the claim in question must be able to serve as an *exemplar* of an entire class of claims: it must be sufficiently representative so that each of us can rehearse a version of such a claim in the privacy of our own epistemological closet. Third, the claim must be directed at an *unremarkable object* – the sort of object which requires no special sort of expertise in order to be able to tell one when you see one. Thus (what one might be tempted to call) ‘a kind of object’ figures in Cartesian examples – a hand, a tomato, an envelope, a chair (but never a nine iron, an M-16 rifle, a Japanese beetle, a goldfinch or a bubble chamber). One must begin

with the right sort of example, in order to get the Cartesian problematic up and running.<sup>15</sup> Fourth, the object must be encountered under *optimal* conditions: in good lighting, at short range, for an extended period of time, etc. An important part of exploring the Cartesian problematic lies in exploring the character and the legitimacy of the examples employed to introduce a Cartesian sceptical recital and ascertaining whether they really do simultaneously possess all four of the required characteristics. A preoccupation with such examples is a hallmark of the Cartesian problematic.

*Second feature*

The Cartesian paradox results from the susceptibility of the existence of such an object to *doubt*. The Cartesian investigation initiates an enquiry into the question what (in our experience of the relevant phenomenon) does and does not admit of the possibility of doubt. It thereby seeks to decompose our experience into two sorts of elements: those which are inherently indubitable and those which involve some (even if perhaps minimal) element of risk. The viability of the ensuing doubt lies in the disclosure of a reliance (on the part of the candidate claim to knowledge) upon those strata of our experience involving this identifiable element of risk. Under the pressure of the Cartesian investigator's demand for certainty, we are led to the discovery that very little in our experience is invulnerable to such forms of doubt.

*Third feature*

The possibility of such a discovery depends on the capacity of the initially selected example to *generalise*. If we don't know *this*, then we don't know anything. That is, in the disclosure that this particular claim to knowledge is vulnerable to doubt, we do not merely take ourselves to learn that we are not able to know a particular thing that we might have thought we did know. ('Oh, OK, I guess I don't know that is a goldfinch after all.') Rather, we take ourselves to learn something about knowledge as such – or at least about a whole class of knowledge claims. ('If I don't know that there is a tomato in front of me right now, then how can I be said to know anything – or at least anything based on the testimony of my senses.') The vulnerability of our initially selected example to doubt seems, at one and the same time, to disclose the vulnerability of vast portions of our supposed edifice of knowledge. Thus, Descartes does not conclude: 'Well, then I don't know that I am sitting here in my dressing gown by the fireplace, after all.' Rather, Descartes finds himself drawn to take an apparently irresistible yet extraordinarily precipitous step to a far more general conclusion of the following sort: 'Well, then I can never know that things are as my senses tell me they are.'

*Fourth feature*

The possibility of such a doubt seems to yield a *discovery*. The sceptical discovery takes the form of *seeing through* the surface of our practices to how they really are. For the results of the Cartesian investigation seem to stand in sharp conflict with our ordinary ways of talking and living. Our practices of entering knowledge claims seem to be fundamentally at odds with what it is that the investigation shows we are really entitled to claim. So, even if the Cartesian inquirer finds himself unable to do other than to continue to speak with the vulgar and to participate in ordinary ways of speaking and acting, nonetheless, in the light of his discovery, these practices must now seem to him to be unmasked as resting upon a tissue of illusion. To the extent that the Cartesian acquiesces in the conclusion his investigation seems to force upon him, he thereby takes himself to be able to see more clearly and deeply into the true nature of these practices than the majority of his fellows who unreflectively participate in them.

*Fifth feature*

The initial thrill of discovery gives way to a mood of *disappointment* with knowledge. There no longer seems to any way for the sort of knowledge in question to live up to its name. And this gives rise to a mood of disillusionment. One takes oneself to have an understanding of what would have had to have been the case for this sort of knowledge to have been possible. But it transpires that, at least for beings such as ourselves, that possibility is not attainable. One is thus left with the feeling that there is something that ought to have been possible but which, as it happens, turns out, at least for us, not to be possible. (The mood of Cartesian scepticism is that of the heroes of Shakespeare's tragedies: one of disappointment at being fated to live in a world that will necessarily betray one's trust in it.<sup>16</sup>) Such a prevailing mood of disappointment or disillusionment as the apparently inescapable response to philosophical enquiry is symptomatic of entanglement in a variant of the Cartesian problematic.

*Sixth feature*

The disappointment lies in our not being *actually* able to do something that we had always taken to be possible (we are unable to know that things *are* as they appear). The world we had pre-reflectively taken ourselves to inhabit – a world in which we were capable of attaining knowledge of a certain sort – threatens to turn out not to be the world we actually inhabit. We can formulate thoughts about what such a world would be like and can perhaps still enjoy experiences that purport to be of such a world, but we now are no longer able in our reflective moments to endorse the contents of such thoughts and experiences.

*Seventh feature*

The structure of the situation we inhabit therefore now seems to come into view as one in which *we cannot do* something we want to be (and pre-reflectively thought of ourselves as fully) able to do. The sceptical discovery seems to disclose a *limit* to our cognitive abilities – a limit that kicks in at a far earlier point in the cognitive process than we, prior to our philosophical investigation, had any reason to expect, a limit that we cannot penetrate or circumvent, try as we might.

*Eighth feature*

This inability is taken to be a function of our inability to bridge a certain sort of gap. In the case of philosophy of perception, the gap looms between my inner life and the outer world; in the case of other minds, it opens up between his outer behaviour and his inner life, etc. The Cartesian takes himself to have made a genuine discovery in having disclosed the existence of such a gap. Cartesian strategies for finding a way around the Cartesian paradox involve attempts to find a way to live with this gap. The Cartesian who wants to avoid a sceptical conclusion wants to be able to negotiate his way across the gap. (Descartes himself famously looked to God for some assistance in this matter.) But the gap itself is one he still takes to be just *there*. As long as one operates within the confines of the Cartesian problematic, the only possible form of ‘solution’ to the problem of scepticism lies in attempting to construct some such sort of bridge across the gap. I will call the sort of gap at issue here ‘a *Cartesian gap*’.

*Ninth feature*

The Cartesian inquirer will wish to distinguish *theoretical doubt* from *practical doubt*. His doubt, he will tell us, is a merely theoretical one. Though, as such, it represents, he will insist, a perfectly intelligible outcome to an intellectual enquiry; nevertheless, he will also insist, conviction in such a conclusion cannot be sustained by someone caught up in the midst of a practical situation. Cartesian sceptical doubt thus possesses an *inherent instability* due to the impossibility of its realisation in practice.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, we are often reassured by philosophers who wish to introduce us to this problematic that the Cartesian enquiry is one that can and should be suspended for practical purposes.<sup>18</sup> Such reassurances presuppose the standing possibility of practically abstaining from one’s sceptical surmise and re-embracing the modes of experience, thought and expression thereby brought into question. Such an insistence upon the purely theoretical character of the generality of the form of doubt that is at issue in philosophical enquiry is a hallmark of the Cartesian problematic.<sup>19</sup>

***Kantian genre***

Kantian scepticism does not quite share any of the above nine generic features. The Kantian genre of scepticism exhibits instead the following nine *Kantian features* – each of which involves a peculiar displacement or reversal or inversion of the corresponding Cartesian feature:

- 1 It is constitutive of the sort of investigation into knowledge that it is that it is characterised by a peculiar sort of *indifference to the character of the object* it takes up as an example.
- 2 It does not issue in a doubt, but a *boggle*.
- 3 The paradox is not the result of moving from a conclusion about a particular object to a general conclusion about all objects of experience, but rather a result of the inability to see how there could so much as be an experience that purports to be *of a particular*.
- 4 The investigation climaxes not in a sense of discovery, but one of *mystery*.
- 5 This investigation ends in a mood not of disappointment, but of *despair*.
- 6 The despair is born not of the impossibility of showing how what we take to be possible could be actual, but of showing how what we take to be actual could be *possible*.
- 7 It no longer looks as if there is something we cannot do, now it looks as if there is *nothing to do* (not even dream) where we had previously thought there was something.
- 8 The apparent disintegration of this something into a nothing is the consequence of a *Kantian gap*.
- 9 The Kantian sceptical surmise is not merely practically unstable, but *theoretically unstable qua surmise*.

*First feature*

To say that it is constitutive of the Kantian problematic that it is characterised by the *absence of a special category of example* is to say no more or less than what Kant means to say when he says that transcendental logic, though it does not abstract entirely from objects, is concerned only with the conditions of the possibility of the pure thought of an object: with what it is for thought to be able so much as to be able to have a bearing on the world, what it is for our thought to be related to objects *überhaupt*. Transcendental logic must abstract from all differences between objects – from what it is to be cognitively related to this rather than that sort of object – but not from relatedness to an object as such. The two sides of the Kantian problematic, in its classical formulation, turn on how sensibility can yield deliverances that are of objects and how thought can be directed at a (mind-independent) world. The problematic that unfolds here homogenises the field of possible examples. The questions ‘What it is to *dream* that I am in front of a fireplace?’ and ‘What is

it to *see* a fireplace in front of me?’ become simultaneously problematised and equally urgent. The questions ‘What is it to *know* that I am now in Auburn, Alabama?’ and ‘What is it to *think* of a celestial city?’ become equally urgent. The differences between such kinds of example (which play such a crucial role in the context of the Cartesian problematic) cease to be relevant.<sup>20</sup> It is no less a problem for the Kantian to understand how we are so much as able to think thoughts that are false than it is to understand how it is that we are able to think thoughts that are true. The examples occurring in explorations of the Kantian problematic therefore often exhibit a curiously schematic character: they lack the concreteness of their Cartesian counterparts – not only in the sense that they come in for less determinate characterisation, but also in the comparative lack of specification of the epistemic standing of the claim under investigation or of the cognitive attitude adopted towards it.

*Second feature*

Under the pressure of the Kantian question, all our cognitive capacities (the capacity to doubt among them) come to seem equally questionable. Having worked his way far into a particular philosophical dialectic, the Kantian sceptic comes to an impasse: it suddenly no longer seems to him possible that one should be able so much as to frame thoughts that are about the world (or to experience another’s bodily movements as expressions of emotion, or to traffic in forms of words that are replete with meaning, etc.). This sort of sceptic becomes perplexed as to what it is to be experiencing or thinking or meaning things in ways that he also cannot help but take himself to be doing in and through the very act of asking his sceptical question. To move in the direction in which his question leads is apparently to deprive his question (along with the whole of the rest of his ‘thought’) of the capacity to possess determinate content. And yet he is unable to dismiss his question. It has come to seem intellectually compulsory. So his mind *boggles*. Such a boggling of the mind, in the face of a looming conclusion that can neither be approached nor avoided – neither fully comprehended nor simply dismissed on the grounds of its incomprehensibility – is a mark of entanglement in a variant of the Kantian problematic.

*Third feature*

What is at issue in the Kantian problematic is the possibility of making claims in general, not knowledge claims in particular. This means that the point of departure for a Kantian investigation is not a particular case of knowledge, but rather the topic of the vulnerability of our thought to reality. This, in a certain sense, reverses the direction of the Cartesian investigation: The Kantian paradox is not the result of moving from a conclusion about the character of our experience of a particular case to a general conclusion

about all objects of experience, but rather a result of inability to see how there could so much as be an experience which purports to be *of a particular*. To respond to the Kantian sceptic is to show how our thinking can have a sort of dependence on the world that allows our activity of making claims to come intelligibly into view as one of claim-making at all. In the absence of an adequate response here, the world threatens to recede from our grasp – to the point where not only do we have reason to fear, with the Cartesian sceptic, that we are unable to know which of our claims about it are true, but rather – to the point where we cannot any longer even make sense of the idea that we are able to enter claims about anything of a sufficiently determinate character to be either true or false. This sense of the fading away of the possibility of determinate empirical content in our thought, experience and discourse is a mark of entanglement in the Kantian problematic.

#### *Fourth feature*

We can only discover that which we can think. The Cartesian investigation can issue in a discovery, because the Cartesian takes himself to be able to form a stable conception of that which he discovers we do not have. The Kantian paradox takes the form not of a discovery, but of a *mystery*. In each of the three variants of Kantian scepticism briefly sketched above, the Kantian paradox is one in which the possibility of a sort of appearance usually taken for granted in the corresponding variant of Cartesian scepticism suddenly comes to seem mysterious: how what impinges on my senses could so much as appear to be revelatory of the world; how the inert fleshly matter comprising someone's body could so much as appear to be revelatory of his inner life; and how a mere sequence of dead signs could so much as appear to be alive with significance. Our ordinary cognitive capacities appear intolerably mysterious now and therefore seem to call for a philosophical project that will relieve our discomfort by providing an account of these capacities that drains them of their mystery.<sup>21</sup>

#### *Fifth feature*

If such a Kantian investigation (into the very possibility of our being able to frame thoughts, enjoy experiences, express meanings, etc.) ends in sceptical paradox, the resulting mood is not one of disappointment – for disappointment (like discovery) is possible only where some glimmering of what it is that one wants (but cannot have) is also available to one. Kant says (concerning what he calls) scepticism, that it is a 'way of thinking, in which reason moves against itself with such violence, that it could never have arisen except in *völliger Verzweiflung* of achieving satisfaction with respect to reason's most important aspirations' (Kant 1977 (1783): 19). The violence with which here, in what Kant calls scepticism, reason turns against itself is a violence of the

most extreme possible sort. What reason questions is *itself*. Our faculty for rational thought arrives at the point where it asks itself (not just how this or that cognitive capacity is possible, but) how it itself is possible, questioning the possibility of the exercise of the very capacity exercised in the framing of such a question. This question is one that reason would be driven to pose only if it found itself in a state of *völliger Verzweiflung* – complete desperation or despair – we might say: despair born of desperation. (The mood of Kantian scepticism is that of the heroes of Kafka’s parables: one of bewilderment at the dissolution of the world’s conditions of intelligibility.<sup>22</sup>)

*Sixth feature*

When reason thus questions its own possibility, the natural history of reason enters a new and radical stage – a sceptical paradox of a different order from the Cartesian is broached. The problem is no longer to understand how something we took to be possible can be actual. The problem is now one that threatens the entire array of cognitive capacities which the Cartesian sceptic takes to be unproblematically available: the capacities to doubt and dream, to feel and think and believe, to enjoy sensory impressions of fireplaces and frame hypotheses about evil demons. The problem now is to understand how something that we take to be actual – for example, the exercise of those cognitive capacities evidently actualised in our philosophical reflections (reflections that themselves seek to address the question of the possibility of such capacities) – can be possible.<sup>23</sup>

*Seventh feature*

This collapse of the space of possibilities leaves it looking not – as in the Cartesian case – as if there is something we cannot do. Now it looks as if there is *nothing to do* (not even to dream) where we had previously thought there must be something. The Kantian sceptical discovery, rather than disclosing a boundary which our cognitive abilities run up against, seems to deprive us of any territory through which such a boundary might be able to run. This sense that, in our philosophical enquiry, we have found a way to make the Cartesian limit disintegrate (though at the possible cost of ceasing to be able to make sense of our lives) is symptomatic of entanglement in the Kantian problematic.

*Eighth feature*

The Cartesian takes himself to run up against a gap in his philosophising (a gap between mind and world, between the body of the other and his soul, between interpretation and meaning, etc.). He takes himself to have made a genuine discovery in having disclosed the existence of such a gap. The gap

itself is just *there*. The Kantian also seems to encounter a certain sort of gap in his philosophising (between sensory blindness and sensory consciousness, between an inexpressive expanse of mere flesh and the animated field of an expressive human body, between meaningless sequences of marks and noises and determinately meaningful expressions of thought, etc.). But it is not clear what it would be to acquiesce in the existence of his gap. It must already be bridged (as evidenced by his present ability to exercise his capacities for perception, expression, and thought); and yet, as long as the threat of Kantian paradox has yet to be averted, it also appears that there is no way to bridge the gap. Thus, the Kantian problematic tends to be most lucidly adumbrated in the writings of kinds of Kantian who aim to show that where we seem to be confronted with a Kantian gap, we are confronted with only the illusion of a gap.

#### *Ninth feature*

If, as was said above, the philosophical outcome that now looms is one that threatens the array of cognitive capacities which the Cartesian sceptic takes to be unproblematically available (the capacities to doubt and dream, to feel and think and believe, to enjoy sensory impressions of fireplaces and frame hypotheses about evil demons), then the full import of Kantian sceptical paradox must remain intellectually unschematisable. There can be no such thing as getting ‘it’ fully into focus, for getting things into focus seems precisely to be just a further instance of the sort of thing which we now seem bound to conclude we are unable to do. The Kantian worry is not merely (like the Cartesian one) a form of philosophical perplexity that ceases to be sustainable when the attempt is made to translate it into practice. It cannot even be sustained at the level of theory. The practical possibility of abstaining from the modes of experience and thought and expression that are here brought into question is not an option that can present itself even momentarily as a live one. This form of sceptical paradox is therefore not unstable merely in the way the Cartesian one is (i.e. because we cannot sustain our conviction in it, as we leave the closet of our philosophy and immerse ourselves in the practical exigencies of life), the Kantian paradoxical surmise already occupies a state of radical instability *qua* surmise.<sup>24</sup> The Kantian sceptic finds himself drawn to a question he is both unable to hold stably in his mind and yet unable to dismiss.<sup>25</sup>

#### **4 The inflection of philosophical vocabulary in Cartesian and Kantian registers**

The perspicuous overview I have offered of various kinds of scepticism allows one to distinguish some of the very different sorts of things philosophers may take themselves to mean when they employ vocabulary such as ‘scepticism’,

‘sceptical paradox’, etc. Moreover, which register – Cartesian or Kantian – a philosopher is operating in will also determine the manner in which a great deal of the rest of his philosophical vocabulary is inflected. Equipped with the preceding overview of Cartesian and Kantian features, it becomes possible, for example, to survey the history of twentieth-century analytic philosophy and to notice that philosophers (in their discussions of what they call ‘scepticism’) often tend to be preoccupied with one of these two registers to the exclusion of the other. Most of the mainstream of analytic philosophy has been obsessed with the Cartesian problematic. Moore, Russell, Broad, Ayer, Price and Chisholm are among the most distinguished members of this Cartesian branch of the analytic tradition. But there is also a branch of the analytic tradition that, though it has fewer members, is equally as distinguished, and occupies itself almost entirely with the Kantian problematic. It includes among its members C.I. Lewis, Wilfrid Sellars and Peter Strawson. If one then examines how a great deal of philosophical vocabulary (‘experience’, ‘epistemic’, ‘object’, ‘the given’, etc.) is employed, one notices that it acquires a very different inflection in the writings of one of these sets of authors than it acquires in the writings of the other.<sup>26</sup>

Not only individual bits of vocabulary but whole phrases, clauses, sentences and questions acquire a different philosophical valence depending upon whether they occur in the context of the investigation of a Cartesian or a Kantian problematic. Thus, for example, consider the following question: ‘Can our cognitive powers reach all the way to the objects themselves?’ This can express a Cartesian anxiety about the existence of a gap between our representations of outer objects and those outer objects themselves (the anxiety here is that our cognitive powers always operate at an awkward remove from the objects they represent), or it can express a Kantian anxiety about our capacity to direct our thought at objects (the anxiety here is that our so-called cognitive powers are unable to furnish us with anything which even amounts to a ‘representation.’) Since the same form of words can, on a particular occasion, express either a Cartesian or a Kantian anxiety, it becomes possible, as we shall soon see, for two philosophers to take themselves to be in agreement with one another when they are not, or to take themselves to be in disagreement with one another when they are not. It thus becomes important, when seeking to identify the sort of philosophical problematic in which a philosopher is entangled, to look beyond the most superficial features of his work, such as the forms of words that he is drawn to employ when framing his problem. One must look instead to the character of the features that characterise his problematic. One philosopher may adopt another philosopher’s mode of speaking wholesale and yet miss his problematic entirely.<sup>27</sup>

The remaining sections of this chapter will develop this point – that one may be tempted by such superficial similarities of vocabulary to shoehorn a sceptical paradox bearing Kantian features into a problematic of the

Cartesian form and vice versa – to clarify how some of Wittgenstein’s most distinguished commentators have misunderstood one another. Wittgenstein and Kant are the outstanding figures in the history of philosophy whose writings have been concerned to explore the nature and structure of the Cartesian and Kantian problematics alike and, above all, to explore the relation between them.<sup>28</sup> By failing to identify clearly these varieties of sceptical problematic while also failing to see that in both Kant’s and Wittgenstein’s writings the term ‘scepticism’ is inflected broadly enough to range over both these varieties (thereby failing to appreciate Kant’s and Wittgenstein’s respective interests in their connection), otherwise insightful commentators have believed that they agree with one another (and with Kant or Wittgenstein) when they do not and have believed that they disagree with one another when they do not. I will illustrate this point here only in connection with Wittgenstein’s work. As a first example of such a misunderstanding, let us consider a misencounter between Hilary Putnam and John McDowell.

## 5 A case of apparent agreement: Putnam and McDowell

In his 1994 *Dewey Lectures*,<sup>29</sup> Hilary Putnam attempts to identify a widespread assumption that he claims runs throughout early modern philosophy – he dubs the assumption in question ‘the interface conception’ – and he argues that, three centuries later, it continues to be responsible for many of the difficulties that plague contemporary philosophy. Putnam characterises the consequences of the continuing hold of this assumption on the philosophical imagination of our time as nothing short of a ‘disaster’:

[T]he key assumption responsible for the disaster is the idea that there has to be an interface between our cognitive powers and the external world – or, to put the same point differently, the idea that our cognitive powers cannot reach all the way to the objects themselves.

(Putnam 1999: 10)

Putnam here glosses (what he calls) ‘the key assumption’ as follows: ‘the idea that our cognitive powers cannot reach all the way to the objects themselves’. We will turn in a moment to the question of what assumption it is that these words express. Let us simply note for now that Putnam wishes to claim that if only we could overcome the assumption expressed by these words we would then be in a position to embrace with a sound philosophical conscience what he (following William James) calls ‘the natural realism of the common man’. This locution – ‘natural realism’ – as Putnam deploys it, is not meant to be a label for an alternative philosophical position; rather it is meant to denote something both more familiar and more elusive: our own pre-philosophical

understanding of the character of our cognitive relation to the world, prior to its corruption by certain forms of philosophising that have now come to seem to be forms of post-scientific common sense. Thus, Putnam is able to describe what he seeks to recommend in the *Dewey Lectures* as the cultivation of a kind of second naiveté about the objects of perception. But our philosophical consciences *are* troubled. Putnam knows this, and thus knows that, in issuing his call for a return to a lost state of epistemological innocence, he is bound to appear to many of his colleagues to be merely the most recent incarnation of the proverbial philosophical ostrich burying his head in the sands of our everyday ways of talking and thinking. What makes it inevitable that things will so appear to many of his colleagues, according to Putnam, is the interface conception: it is what makes it look as if the recommended species of naiveté cannot be anything other than *mere* naiveté. Putnam credits John McDowell, in his book *Mind and World*, with having identified (what Putnam calls in the passage above) the 'key assumption'.<sup>30</sup> But Putnam is here misreading McDowell;<sup>31</sup> and in order to pinpoint how such a misreading of McDowell comes about, it helps to be able to see how a phrase such as 'our cognitive powers cannot reach all the way to the objects themselves' can hover – and does hover on Putnam's pages – between two different sorts of philosophical problematic: a Cartesian and a Kantian one. While often faithfully paraphrasing or quoting McDowell's exact words, Putnam changes the significance of McDowell's words by transplanting McDowell's locutions into the context of Putnam's own attack on the interface conception. As the context in which the relevant stretches of McDowell's prose figure shifts from the exploration of a Kantian to that of a Cartesian problematic, so does their sense.

A central aim of McDowell's book is to make room for the following truism (one that philosophy can easily seem to place out of reach) which Wittgenstein expresses, in McDowell's favourite quotation from Wittgenstein, as follows: 'When we say, and mean, that such-and-such is the case we – and our meaning – do not stop anywhere short of the fact' (PI 95).<sup>32</sup> This sounds very much like things Putnam himself wants to say, for example, in wishing to affirm that 'our cognitive powers can reach all to the objects themselves'. In affirming this, Putnam represents himself, in the *Dewey Lectures*, as spelling out some of the basic ideas behind McDowell's strategy for making room for truisms of the above Wittgensteinian sort. And, of course, the negation of the claim which figures in the last phrase in the above quotation from Putnam – 'that our cognitive powers cannot reach all the way to the objects themselves' – *can* be taken as merely paraphrasing the same truism that figures in McDowell's favourite quotation from Wittgenstein. It is clear that Putnam, in aligning himself with McDowell, wishes us to take it that way. But it is equally clear that he also wishes us to take the negation of the claim expressed by that phrase as the expression of the repudiation of the disastrous assumption forced on us by the interface conception. It is in wishing to be able to mean

words such as these in both of these ways at once that Putnam gets entangled both in his understanding of the structure and aim of the argument of McDowell's *Mind and World* and in his proposals for a way out of the problems that currently plague contemporary philosophy.

One sign that some slippage has taken place is that the Wittgenstein passage – and McDowell's book generally – is concerned with the possibility of *meaning* (with the possibility of our being able to mean something – rather than nothing – by our words), whereas much of the *Dewey Lectures* are focally concerned with the possibility of *knowledge* (with how it is that we can know things are as they seem). In his opening remarks, Putnam expresses the thought he seeks to vindicate in his lectures as follows: 'there is a way to do justice to our sense that knowledge claims are responsible to reality without recoiling into metaphysical fantasy' (Putnam 1999: 4). But from McDowell's point of view, the focus here on *knowledge* claims (as the paradigm for understanding the kind of responsibility to reality which philosophy brings into question) must count as at best misleading, and at worst misguided. For it invites a misidentification of the strand of philosophy that McDowell is focally concerned to treat: it invites the substitution of a Cartesian for a Kantian problematic. McDowell would, of course, not want to deny that we should view knowledge claims as responsible to reality. But he would want to insist that, for the purposes of his investigation, they constitute only a special case of a more general (Kantian) problematic concerning the possibility of the vulnerability of any claim to how things are. The sort of vulnerability to reality under investigation in his book is exhibited in false claims equally fully as in true ones, in our capacity for thinking (indeed, dreaming) as it does in our capacity for knowing. McDowell's investigation does not single out those of our claims that are knowledgeable. This is because it is concerned with what must be the case for any sort of human intellectual activity to be intelligible as one of claim-making at all. It is the possibility of making claims in general, not knowledge claims in particular, that comes to seem at risk when our entitlement to the truism in Wittgenstein's remark seems to come under threat.

As he proceeds in his lectures, as we shall see in a moment, Putnam himself describes the issue with which he is concerned in terms that make no particular reference to knowledge, for instance as the 'how does language hook on to the world' issue. So it may seem an uncharitable quibble to raise worries about his opening formulation of the issue in terms of knowledge. But what I said above about the phrase 'our cognitive powers cannot reach all the way to the objects themselves' applies equally to the question 'how does language hook on to the world?' In the pages of Putnam's *Dewey Lectures*, these forms of words hover unstably between the expression of a Cartesian and a Kantian worry – and that instability can be resolved only at the cost of depriving Putnam's preferred diagnosis of the source of contemporary philosophy's ills of its intended generality. Putnam insists in his *Dewey Lectures*

on privileging a Cartesian problematic as holding the key to a diagnosis of philosophy's most fundamental problems.<sup>33</sup> But Putnam's 'key assumption' cannot unlock the problems that McDowell seeks to address.

Large stretches of the *Dewey Lectures* make sense only if the worry expressed in questions such as 'Can our cognitive powers reach all the way to the objects themselves?' and 'How does language hook on the world?' is taken to be of a Cartesian variety. Consider the following sequence of passages from Putnam's *Dewey Lectures*:

Let us now ask just why realism about 'the external world' came to seem problematical. Early modern philosophers assumed that the immediate objects of perception were mental, and that mental objects were nonphysical . . . What is more, even their materialist opponents often put forward accounts of perception that closely paralleled these 'Cartesian' accounts. Even in contemporary cognitive science, for example, it is the fashion to hypothesise the existence of 'representations' in the cerebral computer. If one assumes that the mind is an *organ*, and one goes on to identify the mind with the brain, it will then become irresistible to (1) think of some of the 'representations' as analogous to the classical theorist's 'impressions' . . . (2) think that those 'representations' are linked to objects in the organism's environment only causally, and not cognitively) . . . I agree with James, as well as with McDowell, that the false belief that perception *must* be so analysed is at the root of all the problems with the view of perception that, in one form or another, has dominated Western philosophy since the seventeenth century . . . The tendency in the last thirty years to repress what continues to puzzle us in the philosophy of perception obstructs the possibility of progress with respect to the broader epistemological and metaphysical issues that do preoccupy us . . . [H]ow could the question 'how does language hook on the world?' even appear to pose a difficulty, unless the retort: 'How can there be a problem about talking about, say, houses and trees when we see them all the time' had not already been rejected in advance as question-begging or 'hopelessly naïve'. The 'how does language hook on to the world' issue is, at bottom, a replay of the old 'how does perception hook on to the world' issue. And is it any wonder if, after thirty years of virtually ignoring . . . the task of challenging the view of perception that has been received since the seventeenth century . . ., the very idea that thought and language do connect with reality has come to seem more and more problematical? Is it any wonder that one can't see how thought and language hook on to the world if one never mentions perception?

(Putnam 1999: 9–13)

If this sequence is taken as offering a diagnosis of most of what ails contemporary philosophy, and if the question at issue is taken to express both the worry made urgent by the interface conception and yet somehow at the same time the one that animates the sorts of philosophical worry McDowell seeks to address in *Mind and World*, then Putnam may not claim McDowell as an ally. What McDowell will take to be unsatisfactory in Putnam's diagnosis can be put as follows: Putnam, in effect, suggests that the various forms of Kantian scepticism that have come to seem so urgent in recent philosophy can be exorcised simply through the treatment of Cartesian scepticism. McDowell would want to press the following question: Is Putnam right in claiming that the 'how does language hook on to the world?' issue is, at bottom, simply a replay of the old 'how does perception hook on to the world?' issue? The correct answer to this question is: it depends on *which* 'how does language hook on to the world' issue is at issue. (As I have indicated above, there is a Cartesian and a Kantian version of the issue.) McDowell would contend that Putnam's claim is not right about the version of the problem that is, for the most part, the one that figures at the centre of concern in the writings of, for example, Lewis or Sellars or Kripke. The Kantian difficulty (concerning thought's or language's capacity to be vulnerable to reality), with which each of the aforementioned authors struggles, does not, for the most part, have its source in a Cartesian difficulty (concerning the indirect character of all perceptual contact with the 'external' world). None of these authors is evidently concerned to urge a version of (what the *Dewey Lectures* calls) the 'received' view of perception; and Putnam's efforts to highlight the dubious assumptions underlying the 'received' view do not evidently bear on their problems.

Although it is true that McDowell, like Putnam, is concerned to vindicate (what Putnam, following James, calls) 'the natural realism of the common man', it is not an exaggeration to say that McDowell's diagnosis of the sources of the perplexities with which contemporary philosophy struggles is roughly the reverse of Putnam's most recent one: where Putnam argues that it is only if we think through what is confused in the Cartesian sceptic's question 'Do we *really* see houses and chairs?' that will we free ourselves from the confusions visited upon us by the analytical-Kantian sceptical question 'how does language hook on to the world?', McDowell thinks that it is only once we think through what is hopeless about the sort of Kantian bind in which someone like C. I. Lewis threatens to place himself<sup>34</sup> – one in which it is no longer possible to see how thought can so much as be answerable to reality – that we will be able fully to free ourselves from Cartesian worries about the character of our perceptual relatedness to houses and chairs. For Putnam, in the *Dewey Lectures*, the Cartesian paradox is the fundamental source of (what Putnam calls) 'the broader epistemological and metaphysical issues' that continue to 'preoccupy us' in contemporary philosophy (Putnam 1999: 11). For McDowell, in *Mind and World*, the Cartesian worry is an intelligible,

though inept, response to an inchoate form of philosophical anxiety that achieves comparatively fuller expression in the sort of Kantian paradox that, in his view, haunts the projects of authors such as Lewis, Sellars, Davidson and Brandom.

This misencounter between Putnam and McDowell is not atypical. A perspicuous overview of varieties of scepticism enables us to identify such occasions – occasions on which philosophers systematically misunderstand one another's writings: sometimes paying one another undeserved compliments, and at other times going to battle against one another when their views in no way disagree. In Putnam's misappropriation of McDowell's diagnosis of the sceptical paradox that haunts contemporary philosophy, we have a case of merely apparent agreement between two of the finest philosophers of our time. Now let us consider a complementary case – one of merely apparent disagreement.

## 6 An apparent disagreement: Cavell and Kripke

Stanley Cavell's *The Claim of Reason* presents a brilliant account of certain aspects of Wittgenstein's treatment of Cartesian scepticism. Saul Kripke's book *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language* (Kripke 1982) explores certain aspects of Wittgenstein's presentation of Kantian scepticism. When Cavell, at one point in *The Claim of Reason*, pauses to list (what he calls) 'three phenomenologically striking features of the conclusion which characterises scepticism', what he goes on to cite are clearly features of (what I have been calling) Cartesian scepticism: (1) 'the sense of *discovery* expressed in the conclusion of the investigation'; (2) 'the sense of the *conflict* of this discovery with our ordinary "beliefs"'; and (3) 'the *instability* of the discovery, the theoretical conviction it inspires vanishing under the pressure (or distraction) of our ordinary commerce with the world' (Cavell 1979: 129). Kripke devotes far less care to characterising the phenomenologically striking features of the conclusion that characterises the sort of scepticism that concerns him. But one does not have to read far into his book before the following three aspects of his sceptical paradox emerge with some clarity: (1) whatever Cartesian features the paradox might initially appear to possess belong not properly to it but rather merely to the initial motivating (but also misleading) exposition of it (according to which 'the problem may appear to be epistemological'); (2) an encounter with the paradox takes the phenomenological form not of an initial doubt that eventuates in a Cartesian discovery, but rather of an initial 'eerie feeling' that eventuates in (something that bears all the earmarks of) a Kantian boggle (about the very possibility of ever being able determinately to mean anything); so that (3) the form of the conclusion is not one of generalised Cartesian doubt (about our ability ever to discover what is really meant), but rather one of Kantian unschematisability (in the face of an impending yet incomprehensible outcome in which 'the entire idea of meaning vanishes into thin air').<sup>35</sup>

Each of these books has a hold of a portion of philosophical territory Wittgenstein is concerned to explore that the other misses. Cavell, however, declares himself unable to recognise the problematic that Kripke calls one of ‘scepticism’ to be a variety of scepticism at all, let alone one in which Wittgenstein should interest himself. This misses something important in Wittgenstein. In saying this, I do not mean here to express sympathy with the substance of Kripke’s suggestions for how to understand Wittgenstein’s preferred response to the (so-called) ‘rule-following paradox’ and especially not with his attribution to Wittgenstein of a ‘sceptical solution’ to that (or any other) sceptical paradox. I mean only to affirm that the paradox which Kripke finds in Wittgenstein is one that Wittgenstein seeks to address, that it is only one instance of a particular sort of philosophical paradox, that Wittgenstein throughout his writings is repeatedly concerned to formulate and address paradoxes of this shape, and that such paradoxes are ones that belong to that broader genus of philosophical perplexity that Wittgenstein means to designate – as did Kant before him – by the term ‘scepticism’. The paradox at which Wittgenstein arrives in Section 201 of *Philosophical Investigations* bears all the earmarks of (what I have been calling) a Kantian sceptical paradox; and the dialectic which threads its way through the preceding sections of the *Philosophical Investigations* is mired in a Kantian sceptical problematic. Indeed, it is the third variant of the Kantian problematic mentioned early on in this chapter – the one that centres on the question ‘How can a sequence of marks or noises so much as seem to *mean* something?’

Cavell says, in his discussion of Kripke in *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome* (Cavell 1990), that he wishes to question whether Kripke’s examples illustrate ‘scepticism’; and Cavell evidently feels that conceding that they do would threaten something important about his own reading of Wittgenstein. But this perception on Cavell’s part stems largely from a failure to command a clear overview of the shape of the philosophical terrain here. Armed with such an overview, it becomes possible to see that nothing in Cavell’s admirable corpus of work on Wittgenstein would be threatened by such a concession. The term ‘scepticism’ in Cavell’s work – and in his writings on Wittgenstein – does exclusively denote a problematic of the Cartesian variety. To concede, however, that Wittgenstein is interested in variants of the Kantian paradox does not gainsay his equally ubiquitous fascination with their Cartesian counterparts. Cavell, in his discussion of Kripke’s reading, begins with a surely sound observation – to wit: that what Kripke calls Wittgenstein’s ‘sceptical solution’ is not anything Wittgenstein would countenance as a ‘solution’ to a philosophical problem. But Cavell moves precipitously from this observation to the conclusion that if Kripke’s solution is not Wittgenstein’s then ‘the problem to which Kripke offers the solution is not (quite) Wittgenstein’s either’ (Cavell 1990: 69). This is a *non-sequitur*. The reason I think Cavell feels bound to take this step is because he is quite properly unable to recognise the sceptical paradox of Section 201 of

*Philosophical Investigations* to be one that bears (what I have called) Cartesian features. Hence Cavell goes on to remark:

Kripke reports that sometimes, contemplating the situation of discovery that one may mean nothing at all, he has had ‘something of an eerie feeling’ (p. 21), and that ‘the entire idea of meaning vanishes into thin air’ (p. 22). Is this, I ask myself, like the feelings I have had, under a sceptical surmise, of the world vanishing (as it were behind its appearances), or my self vanishing (as it were behind or inside my body)? These feelings have been touchstones for me of sceptical paradox, of conclusions I cannot, yet become compelled to, believe. . . . I would like to say that when the entire idea of meaning vanishes into thin air what vanishes was already air, revealing no scene of destruction.

(Cavell 1990: 80).<sup>36</sup>

One can hear Cavell in this passage – and in much of the rest of his subsequent questioning of ‘whether Kripke’s examples illustrate scepticism’ – quite rightly pointing out that Kripke’s alleged sceptical paradox bears none of the Cartesian features: it does not begin with *a best case of knowledge*, the investigation does not issue in a *discovery* to which one is unable to accommodate oneself, the conclusions that Kripke draws about his examples do not *generalise* in accordance with the logic of the Cartesian format, etc. I therefore find myself agreeing with everything that Cavell has to say about this, except his conclusion – that is, I agree that the paradox of Section 201 is not a Cartesian sceptical paradox, but not that it is not a sceptical paradox.

## 7 A second apparent disagreement: Cavell and McDowell

Before considering our second case of apparent disagreement, it will help to contrast (what I will call) the *Kantian way with scepticism* with the *Wittgensteinian way with scepticism*. The positive touchstone of the Kantian way is a radical following through of the implicit assumptions of a sceptical position up to the point at which the position founders in incoherence. The negative touchstone of the Kantian way is that it seeks to find a way to respond to the Cartesian that by-passes the task of having to enter into the details of Cartesian examples, exploring how they are motivated, and considering how they differ from ordinary examples of knowledge. The Wittgensteinian way is not an alternative to, but rather a supplementation of the Kantian way. The difference between the two ways points up something original in Wittgenstein’s later treatment of philosophical problems that is absent from Kant’s treatment of scepticism. The Wittgensteinian way incorporates a further movement, pushing the sceptic in the opposite direction from the one

in which Kant seeks to push him: not only following the sceptic's presuppositions out to their ultimate consequences, but also examining the initial steps in the Cartesian sceptic's progress towards doubt, identifying how the sceptic passes from ordinary to philosophical doubt, from a claim to a non-claim context, pinpointing the decisive movement in the philosophical conjuring trick and diagnosing why it is the one that is bound to seem most innocent. Thus, we might say, the Kantian way drives the sceptic forward in his doubt, seeking to propel the sceptic to grace by forcing him to pass through utter despair, whereas the Wittgensteinian way supplements this prospective movement with a retrospective one, leading the sceptic back to the point of entry into his problematic, returning him to the lost innocence of the everyday. The Kantian way compels the sceptic to progress further and further forward, further and further from the ordinary, and deeper and deeper into philosophical perplexity, to an ever more violent form of questioning, to the point at which the sceptic's question consumes itself. The Wittgensteinian way adds to this pressure an additional one that seeks to bring the sceptic back to the place where he started, where he already is and never left, but in such a way that he is able to recognise it for the first time.

These two movements that Wittgenstein's philosophical practice alternately seeks to execute are nicely summarised in the following two remarks:

My aim is: to teach you to pass from a piece of disguised nonsense to a piece of undisguised nonsense.

(PI 464)

What we do is to bring words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use.

(PI 116)

We come therefore now to a further aspect of the fourth form of philosophical insight that a perspicuous overview of the various kinds of philosophical response to scepticism can afford. Commentators on Wittgenstein can easily talk by one another by failing to keep in view the complementarity of these two movements in later Wittgenstein's writings.<sup>37</sup>

We saw, while reviewing Putnam's misencounter with McDowell, how McDowell wished to privilege the Kantian problematic over the Cartesian one; and we saw in Cavell's misencounter with Kripke how Cavell seemed to want to privilege the Cartesian problematic over the Kantian one. Thus, based on the evidence reviewed thus far, the following conclusion might seem tempting: McDowell is primarily concerned to explore the Kantian problematic and Cavell the Cartesian. This is not right, however, about the bulk of either McDowell's or Cavell's work (or that of almost any other sensitive commentator on Wittgenstein). What happens rather, in their respective writings about Wittgenstein, is that Wittgenstein's exploration of one of

these two sceptical problematics tends alternately to come into focus while the other recedes into the background. (And, indeed, I think it is almost inevitable that, in working on later Wittgenstein, one should find this happening to one in one's writing about him.) To illustrate the point, I will place side by side some further passages from Cavell and McDowell – passages in which their roles have been reversed – now McDowell will appear to be the one more preoccupied by the Cartesian dimension and Cavell by the Kantian dimension of Wittgenstein's concerns.

McDowell, in 'Criteria, Defeasibility and Knowledge', argues that (what Wittgenstein calls) criteria are internally related to the justification of claims to knowledge in the following way: if a claim to know that such-and-such turns out not to be justified then the criteria for claiming such-and-such were only apparently satisfied. Thus, for example, if you claim that someone is in pain, and it turns out that that person is only pretending to be in pain, then the criteria for pain were only apparently satisfied. Here is McDowell:

Commentators [on Wittgenstein] often take it that the possibility of pretence shows that criteria are defeasible. This requires the assumption that in successful deception one brings it about that criteria for something 'internal' are satisfied, although the ascription for which they are criteria would be false. But is the assumption obligatory? Here is a possible alternative; in pretending, one causes it to *appear* that criteria for something 'internal' are satisfied (that is, one causes it to appear that someone else could know, by what one says and does, that one is in, say, some 'inner' state); but the criteria are not really satisfied (that is, the knowledge is not really available).

(McDowell 1998b: 380)

Cavell, in *The Claim of Reason*, is concerned to challenge almost exactly the same interpretation of Wittgenstein on criteria that McDowell is concerned to challenge and for many of the same reasons. Yet Cavell comes to (what is at least verbally) precisely the opposite conclusion with regard to how to employ the concept of a criterion in connection with the very sorts of examples that McDowell discusses. Thus, Cavell concludes that even if someone is only pretending to be in pain, if it is *pain* that he is pretending to be in, then his behaviour satisfies the criteria for pain. Here is Cavell:

[O]nly *certain* eventualities will count as [someone's] not being in pain. . . Circumstances, namely, . . . in which we will say (he will be) feigning, rehearsing, hoaxing, etc. Why such circumstances? What differentiates such circumstances from those in which he is (said to be) clearing his throat, responding to a joke, etc.? Just that for 'He's rehearsing' or 'feigning', or 'It's a hoax', etc. to satisfy us as explana-

tions for his *not* being in pain . . . *what* he is feigning must be precisely *pain*, what he is rehearsing must be the part of a man *in pain*, the hoax depends on his simulating *pain*, etc. These circumstances are ones in appealing to which, in describing which, we *retain the concept* (here, of pain) whose application these criteria determine. And this means to me: In all such circumstances he has satisfied the criteria we use for applying the concept of pain to others. It is because of *that* satisfaction that we know that he is feigning pain (i.e., that it is pain he is feigning), and that he knows what to do to feign pain. Criteria are ‘criteria for something’s being so’, not in the sense that they tell us of a thing’s existence, but of something like its identity, not of its *being so*, but of its *being so*.

(Cavell 1979: 45)

The first thing to notice is that McDowell and Cavell appear, at first blush, simply to disagree: in cases of pretending to be in pain, McDowell says the criteria for pain are not satisfied, Cavell says they are. The second thing to notice is that their roles now seem, as promised, to be reversed. McDowell takes Wittgensteinian criteria to operate at a Cartesian level. The question that is settled, according to him, if criteria are satisfied, is one concerning the truth of a claim, the existence of the pain, the reality of the phenomenon. Cavell takes Wittgensteinian criteria to operate at a Kantian level. The question that is settled, according to Cavell, if criteria are satisfied, is not one concerning the truth of a claim but one concerning its purport, not one concerning the existence of something which falls under a concept but the applicability of the concept itself, not one concerning the reality of a phenomenon but one concerning its possibility. Whichever of these two readers of Wittgenstein you take to be on the right track, it is worth noticing that this is the structure of the disagreement here, and that the level at which you take criteria to operate, e.g. in connection with phenomena such as pain, will have decisive consequences for the sort of response to scepticism that will issue from an appeal to ‘criteria’. Now I myself take it that Cavell has got the merely exegetical question right (about what question is settled if Wittgensteinian criteria are satisfied) and McDowell has got it wrong. But I will not argue that point here. (Nor does their difference over this interpretative question mean that there is any substantive philosophical disagreement between McDowell and Cavell here.<sup>38</sup>) What interests me here is the very fact that their disagreement should, at this juncture, have this particular structure. This has a twofold irony, stemming from the ways in which each of them seems to have given up his previous role in the two misencounters canvassed above.

The first irony is to be found in the fact that, in most of his writing about Wittgenstein, McDowell appears to read Wittgenstein as – and in *Mind and World* follows his Wittgenstein in – seeking to take exclusively (what I

called at the beginning of this section) the ‘Kantian way’ with scepticism. McDowell tends to see the Cartesian craving for epistemic security as an intelligible, though inept, response to an inchoate form of the philosophical anxiety that only arrives at clear expression when it is posed as a Kantian sceptical paradox. Thus, despite his Cartesian construal of the grammar of the concept of a criterion in his earlier essay, in *Mind and World*, McDowell proceeds as if the treatment of philosophical scepticism can be prosecuted primarily through attending to the Kantian problematic as a self-standing form of philosophical confusion. Especially in *Mind and World*, he seems to assume, in the manner of Kant himself, not only that the Cartesian sceptical paradox can be shown to be merely a special case of a more general worry, but more importantly that, once this is shown, Cartesianism will be robbed of all its force and will wither away of its own accord without requiring any additional form of specialised treatment. Whereas Cavell, despite his resolutely Kantian construal of the grammar of a criterion, concentrates, above all, in his philosophical writings, on the movement with which the Wittgensteinian way supplements the Kantian way: the return to the ordinary. Cavell takes (and takes Wittgenstein to take) the achievement of such a return to play an essential role in attaining an understanding of the phenomenon of scepticism.<sup>39</sup>

The second irony to be noted in connection with the structure of McDowell’s and Cavell’s disagreement about Wittgenstein’s concept of a criterion lies in the fact that Cavell, though he is far too acute a reader of Wittgenstein to fail to appreciate that the *Philosophical Investigations* is frequently operating at a Kantian level, nonetheless never sees that, for Wittgenstein, as for Kant, the term ‘scepticism’ ranges over far more than a merely Cartesian sceptical problematic – thus over far more varieties of philosophical perplexity than a merely Cartesian inflection of the term is able to encompass. Nonetheless, Cavell, through carefully following out the inner movement of the dialectic traced in Wittgenstein’s investigations, often finds himself fetching up in the terrain of the Kantian problematic. Here is a characteristic passage that may stand for a hundred others:

If you do not know the (non-grammatical) criteria of an Austinian object (can’t identify it, name it) then you lack a piece of information, a bit of knowledge, and you can be told its name, told what it is, told what it is (officially) called. But if you do not know the grammatical criteria of Wittgensteinian objects, then you lack, as it were, not only a piece of information or knowledge, but the possibility of acquiring any information about such objects *überhaupt*; you cannot be told the name of that object, because there is as yet no *object* of that kind for you to attach a forthcoming name to.

(Cavell 1979: 77)

What is threatened here, with the loss of (what Cavell calls) Wittgenstein criteria, is not merely the possibility of isolating an unimpeachable item of knowledge, but the possibility of so much as turning up a candidate for knowledge. At one point in *The Claim of Reason*, Cavell quotes the following four passages from *Philosophical Investigations* in rapid succession:

... [O]nly of a living human being and what resembles (behaves like) a living human being can one say: it has sensations; it sees; is blind; hears; is deaf; is conscious or unconscious.

(PI 281)

What has to be accepted, the given, is – so one could say –*forms of life*.

(PI 226)

What gives us *so much as the idea* that living beings, things, can feel?

(PI 283)

The human body is the best picture of the human soul.

(PI 178)

These are passages in which Wittgenstein presents what Cavell says he understands ‘as the background against which our criteria do their work; even make sense’ (Cavell 1979: 83). They are also quintessential examples of moments in his work in which Wittgenstein’s investigations move (from the Cartesian) to the Kantian level. And, in commenting on these passages, Cavell (taking the problem of other minds here as his example of a sceptical problematic) expresses what he takes to be the significance of such passages in Wittgenstein’s work:

To withhold, or hedge, our concepts of psychological states from a given creature, on the ground that our criteria cannot reach to the inner life of the creature, is specifically to withhold the source of my idea that living beings are things that feel; it is to withhold myself, to reject my response to anything as a living being; to blank so much as my idea of anything as *having a body*. To describe this condition as one in which I do not know (am not certain) of the existence of other minds is empty. There is now nothing there of the right kind, to be known. There is nothing to read from that body, nothing the body is *of*; it does not go beyond itself, it expresses nothing; it does not so much as behave. There is no body left to manifest consciousness (or unconsciousness). It is not dead, but inanimate; it hides nothing

....

My problem is no longer that my words can't get past his body to *him*. There is nothing for them to get to; they can't even reach as far as *my* body . . . The signs are dead; merely working them out loud doesn't breathe life into them; even dogs can speak more effectively.

(Cavell 1979: 83–4)

I take the presence of a Kantian problematic in this passage to be self-evident. If the worry that is here in play were to become urgent, it would eventuate in (not merely a Cartesian doubt, but) a Kantian boggle. Though Cavell, in such passages (and there are many such passages in *The Claim of Reason*), sees that the transition to a Kantian problematic plays an essential role in Wittgenstein's treatment of scepticism, he seems able to interest himself in this transition only to the extent that it forms part of a response to Cartesian scepticism; hence his view of the scope of this problematic in Wittgenstein's writing is artificially blinkered. Central issues – concerning, for example, the nature of the accord between a rule and its application (not only, as in certain employments of the mathematical case, as a trope for learning a word, but as a potentially philosophically perplexing instance of the Kantian problematic in its own right), between an expectation or wish and its fulfilment, etc. – recede into the background of Cavell's reading of Wittgenstein. This blind-spot in Cavell's reading of Wittgenstein (and in his reading of Kant) comes perhaps most visibly to the surface in his discussion of Kripke's reading of Wittgenstein examined above. Although he sees that Wittgenstein is concerned to explore the Kantian problematic, he does not see (and feels that he must not allow) that it can issue in a distinctive (and, as I have tried to show, distinctively Kantian) variety of philosophical paradox – one that Wittgenstein views as a variety of scepticism. This leaves Cavell's account of Wittgenstein's treatment of scepticism essentially incomplete. Only a reading able to accommodate, both exegetically and philosophically, the insights contained in both Cavell's and McDowell's respective readings of Wittgenstein – that is, only one that understands why, in Wittgenstein's treatment of the extended philosophical dialectic of which they each form a part, neither variety of scepticism is to be privileged over the other – will be complete.

## 8 Conclusion

The aim of this chapter has been to suggest that a perspicuous overview of various kinds of scepticism and the kinds of response they engender affords a number of different kinds of philosophical benefit: it allows one to command a clearer view of the sorts of relations that obtain across apparently distinct areas of philosophy; it allows one to distinguish the very different sorts of things philosophers mean when they employ (what is apparently)

the same philosophical vocabulary; and it allows one to see more clearly why authors such as Wittgenstein are often misread. (Here, I have also tried to show how and why some of his best commentators misread one another and misunderstand themselves – taking themselves to disagree with one another when they do not, taking themselves to agree with one another when they do not, and taking themselves to be in agreement with themselves when they are not.) It may also allow one to see more clearly what is distinctive about Wittgenstein's contributions to the history of thought about scepticism; but a proper treatment of that issue must wait for another occasion.<sup>40</sup>

## Notes

- 1 This chapter is a shorter and somewhat differently organised version of a longer paper that will appear in Conant and Kern (forthcoming).
- 2 The taxonomy is meant to serve as a descriptive tool for distinguishing various sorts of philosophical standpoint. It is constructed in as philosophically neutral a fashion as possible. Some of the more specific philosophical claims that I myself express sympathy for in the later part of this chapter (e.g. regarding how these varieties of scepticism are related to one another) do, however, turn on collateral philosophical commitments.
- 3 A reason for referring to the taxonomy offered here as 'partial' is because the overview of varieties of scepticism set forth here is in no way intended to be exhaustive. For example, it is not intended to accommodate (what I take to be) a variety of scepticism that constitutes one strand in Hume's sceptical outlook and which (for lack of a better label) I will call *Pyrrhonian scepticism*, nor a further variety of scepticism, *Agrippan scepticism*, that some contemporary philosophers might think ought to be sharply distinguished from the Pyrrhonian, Cartesian and Kantian varieties (see, for example, Williams 2001: 61ff).
- 4 Such an inclusive use of the term 'scepticism', while unusual, is not unprecedented. For a similarly inclusive use, primarily in connection with Cartesian scepticism, see, for example, Cavell 1979: 46.
- 5 I owe this way of formulating the contrast to Stanley Cavell. See Cavell 1979: 45. However, I make a use of this contrast here – to formulate the distinction between Cartesian and Kantian scepticism – of which Cavell himself might not approve. Nevertheless, it is not an accident that Cavell's formulation of this contrast should perfectly serve my purpose, as we shall see towards the end of this chapter.
- 6 I borrow this characterisation of the sort of case explored within the Cartesian problematic from Cavell. (It should perhaps be noted, however, that Cavell himself thinks of the characterisation as applying to sceptical examples *tout court*, rather than merely to those that figure within one particular variety of scepticism.)
- 7 I say 'variants' of each of these varieties of scepticism arise in each of these 'areas' of philosophy (rather than '*a* variant' of each arises) because in 'areas' such as ethics and philosophy of science – 'areas', that is, that involve a tangle of different sorts of philosophical problem – a multiplicity of variants of each variety are to be found. Indeed, in both ethics and philosophy of science, for example, a version of each of the philosophy of perception variants and each of the philosophy of language variants of sceptical problematic (along with a great many others) are to be found. This furnishes yet a further reason why one

ought to be suspicious of the idea that one should be able to limn the skeleton of philosophy at its joints merely by effecting a division into areas based solely on differences in subject-matter – ethics, science, mathematics, etc.

- 8 For some discussion of the presence of an incipiently Kantian problematic in Descartes' thought, see Conant 1991. What I call in that paper 'a different kind of Cartesianism' is a variant of (what I call in this chapter) 'Kantian scepticism'.
- 9 I speak here, rather tentatively, of *varieties* (rather than *genera*) of scepticism, and of these varieties as subtending *variants* (rather than *species*) of Cartesian and Kantian scepticism respectively, in order to leave this question open. However, I myself do favour a particular line, namely that the apparent 'kinds' in question are, in the end, to be recognised as only apparently distinct kinds.
- 10 I do not mean to claim that either of these sets of features exhaustively characterise either of these varieties of scepticism.
- 11 I do not mean hereby to rule out cases of philosophical discussion that do perfectly exemplify, without blemishes, either the Cartesian or Kantian format respectively, but only to indicate that they are surprisingly rare.
- 12 For it not to be a symptom of (at least some degree of) confusion on an author's part requires, I think, that the author already have thought through – and thus have come to some stable view of his own concerning – the relation between these two varieties of scepticism. There are such authors, but not many.
- 13 See Cavell 1981 and 1996a.
- 14 Cavell's term for this is *negated*.
- 15 Cavell suggests we call the sort of object that figures in such examples 'a generic object' (Cavell 1979: 52–3).
- 16 The internal relation between Cartesian scepticism and Shakespearean tragedy is explored by Cavell in the essays collected in Cavell 1987.
- 17 This conflict between our ordinary practice and our philosophical reflection on that practice is the source of the aura of paradox that accompanies any attempt to acquiesce in a Cartesian sceptical conclusion. That conclusion, taken in isolation, does not have the outward form of a paradoxical assertion (in the way, say, that the liar paradox does); its paradoxical aspect lies instead in our inability to sustain our conviction in such a conclusion when, as Hume puts it, we leave our philosophical study and return to the backgammon table.
- 18 For most everyday purposes, we cannot and should not try to do otherwise than to take the perceptual appearances that present themselves to us – say, the sudden appearance of an oncoming car – to constitute genuine instances of perceptual knowledge. The Cartesian sceptic knows this. He knows that we cannot help but take someone writhing in pain to be in pain; we cannot help but take certain ossified habits of interpretation to disclose the meaning of a sign; etc. If he understands the structure of the Cartesian problematic, he will not take such observations to impugn his procedures. Some philosophers have thought – and have thought that later Wittgenstein thought – that such observations themselves could suffice to overturn such forms of scepticism. That is a misunderstanding of Cartesian scepticism – and a misunderstanding of Wittgenstein's understanding of it. This is not to deny that such observations (or 'reminders', as Wittgenstein preferred to call them) might have a role to play in the treatment of Cartesian scepticism. But they hardly suffice to overturn any interesting form of scepticism.
- 19 Someone who is disinclined to believe in the trustworthiness of the government's pronouncements, or the promises issued in television advertisements, or the impartiality of judicial proceedings, etc., is sometimes called a sceptic in ordinary language. I will refer to this character as *the hard-headed customer*. The differences

between the hard-headed customer and the Cartesian sceptic are perhaps most evident in the light of this ninth feature: There is no difficulty in imagining that the hard-headed customer might be able to convert his various theoretical doubts into practical ones: He may take care not to align his beliefs and actions in accordance with the expectation that the government's pronouncements will be fulfilled, he may make a point of not purchasing items advertised on television, etc. Reflecting on the differences between the hard-headed customer and the Cartesian sceptic can help to bring out how the nine Cartesian features, listed above, are internally related to one another; a proper understanding of each depends upon an appreciation of how it is related to the others. That the hard-headed customer does not suffer from Cartesian scepticism can be seen in part from the fact that he fails to begin with a sufficiently generic object; this, in turn, can be seen from the way in which his doubt fails to generalise as precipitously as in the Cartesian problematic, etc.

- 20 More precisely: the differences between these sorts of examples cease to be relevant for the bulk of the Kantian enquiry. At a late stage in the enquiry, it will become important to a Kantian inquirer to recover these sorts of differences – differences that underwrite the movement of thought in a Cartesian investigation – but only once the Kantian paradox has been averted and the intelligibility of object-directed thought and experience no longer stands under threat.
- 21 Hence, in recent years, the increasingly important relationship between various sorts of philosophical project calling for some sort of naturalistic reduction, on the one hand, and the Kantian problematic in philosophy, on the other. The demand for such reductions in the absence of a plausible programme for their execution can, on the one hand, give rise to the relevant sense of mystery; while a philosophically independently fuelled sense of Kantian paradox can, on the other hand, fuel the sense that a programme of naturalistic reduction is the only possible form of solution to the most urgent philosophical problems that face us today.
- 22 I explore the engagement with a philosophical problematic of this sort in Kafka's parables in Conant 2001.
- 23 To sum up this sixth Kantian feature, one might adapt a joke – which I first heard from Dan Dennett – in the following way: 'Scientists want to know whether something possible is actual. Philosophers want to know whether something actual is possible.'
- 24 Unlike the concluding statement affirmed by a Cartesian sceptic (see n. 17 above), formulations of the Kantian sceptical paradox tend to converge on conclusions that have the canonical form of a logical paradox. This is perhaps particularly evident if one considers the philosophy of language variant of Kantian scepticism. Borrowing, for the moment, the terms in which Kripke couches the paradox, the sceptical conclusion for this variant might, for example, be formulated as follows: 'There is no fact of the matter as to whether this sentence has a meaning.' Or more radically still: 'There isn't anything which this sentence means.' The variant of Kantian scepticism for which this is perhaps least evident is perhaps that of (so-called) 'scepticism regarding other minds'. This is partly because, once we think the Kantian variant of this problem all the way through, we come to see that this ceases to be an apt way of denoting the variety of scepticism that here comes to be at issue. To see that even this variant veers towards a conclusion that has a self-annihilating structure, it is important to see that the structure of the Kantian version of this problem is one in which the initial Cartesian distinction between the (putatively indubitable) case of my own mindedness and the (putatively comparatively dubitable) case

of the mindedness of others is cut out from underneath one. The Kantian sceptical conclusion here is not just that there is nothing which could count as *his* expressing his mental states in a manner that could enable me to know them, but rather: there is nothing which could count as *anyone's* (and therefore: *my*) expressing a mental state.

- 25 Just as it is important to distinguish the Cartesian sceptic from the hard-headed customer, so, too, one should not confuse the Kantian sceptic with yet another character who is often called a 'sceptic' in ordinary language: someone who does not believe in divine revelation, or extrasensory perception, or astrology, etc. I will refer to this character as the *debunker*. He differs from the hard-headed customer in that he believes that the phenomena about which he is 'sceptical' are such as not even to be possible. The hard-headed customer need not call into question the bare possibility of a trustworthy government or a truthful television advertisement; what he doubts is merely their actuality. The debunker's doubt, on the other hand, is directed at the possibility of certain phenomena. Yet it would be a confusion to think the debunker is a Kantian sceptic just because he doubts something to be possible that others take to be actual. His doubt is not a philosophical doubt any more than that of the hard-headed customer is: It does not issue in philosophical paradox. That a successful bout of debunking does not issue in a specifically Kantian variety of paradox can be seen from the way in which the outcome fails properly to satisfy any of the nine Kantian features listed above. This is perhaps most evident in the case of the ninth feature: There is no difficulty in imagining that the debunker might be able to dispense altogether with recourse to, say, divine revelation. His capacity to conceive the impossibility of divine revelation does not appear in any way to be an exercise of a capacity whose very possibility has thereby been called into question. Reflecting on the differences between the debunker and the Kantian sceptic may, again, help to bring out how the nine Kantian features, listed above, are internally related to one another: That the debunker does not suffer from Kantian scepticism can be seen in part from the fact that he begins with a very particular sort of example; its debunking does not eventuate in a Kantian boggle; for he is under no intellectual obligation to take the phenomena (that thereby seem to him not to be possible) to be actual, etc.
- 26 The distinction between these two varieties of scepticism can provide philosophically far less superficial categories for sorting philosophers into groups than those we usually rely upon, such as the alleged divide between analytic and Continental philosophy. One can learn to see past the common philosophical reference points and superficial similarities in philosophical tradition and style that unite thinkers such as Heidegger and Sartre, on the one hand, and Wilfrid Sellars and H.H. Price, on the other, and begin to discern certain fundamental divergences, thus enabling one to notice fundamental philosophical affinities between thinkers from different traditions, allowing one to sort together Heidegger and Sellars, on the one hand, and Sartre and Price, on the other.
- 27 Conversely, one may resolutely avoid a particular philosopher's ways of speaking as a strategy for avoiding his problems and yet end up mired in precisely the philosophical problematic one sought thereby to avoid. This is part of the reason why Richard Rorty's preferred strategies for dissolving philosophical problems tend to be so ineffectual.
- 28 I argue for this claim in the longer version of this chapter cited in note 1.
- 29 Putnam's *Dewey Lectures* were given at Columbia University in March of 1994 and first published in *Journal of Philosophy*. They are reprinted in Putnam (1999) and all references to them will be to that publication.
- 30 The context of the previous quotation makes this evident.

31 I do not mean to deny that McDowell is concerned to criticise the interface conception in some of his writings, most notably in his essay 'Criteria, Defeasibility, and Knowledge' (in McDowell 1998b), but only that McDowell would not identify the target of that essay with 'the key' confusion that he seeks to exorcise in *Mind and World*.

32 Quoted at McDowell 1994: 27.

33 Elsewhere in his writings, Putnam is extremely sensitive in his treatment of philosophical problems that bear the earmarks of a Kantian problematic, and in showing how putative solutions to those problems, if strictly thought through, can be seen to collapse into variants of Kantian scepticism. Putnam's criticisms of attempts to naturalise meaning are an example of this. For a brief discussion, see pp. xlii–xlvi of my 'Introduction' to Putnam 1994.

34 In the longer version of this chapter, cited in note 1, I discuss in some detail how the work of C.I. Lewis is exemplary of a certain kind of Kantian philosopher – one whose work, against its own intention, threatens to collapse into a form of Kantian scepticism.

35 Kripke 1982: 21–2. Kripke initially presents his motivating example in terms that alternate between a Cartesian worry and a Kantian worry. The Cartesian worry can be put as follows: 'How can I *know* whether in the present case someone is adding or quadding; and if I do not know this, then [given that this would appear to be a best case of knowledge of addition] how can I ever know if anyone is really adding?' The Kantian worry can be put as follows: 'How can there ever so much as be a fact of the matter as to whether someone is adding; and, if there cannot then [given that this would appear to be as elementary a case as there can be of someone meaning one thing rather than another] how can anyone ever so much as determinately *mean* anything?'. Kripke himself is – at least in certain places in his book (see, for example, p. 21) – fairly clear that his initial Cartesian characterisations of the issue (according to which, as he says: 'the problem may appear to be epistemological') can serve him only as a provisional expository device (thus he says: 'the ladder must finally be kicked away') for leading people into a sceptical paradox of an altogether different and more fundamental variety.

36 It is peculiar that Cavell should think that his last remark might help to differentiate his problematic from one that does not deserve to be characterised as one of scepticism. It is true that, viewed from the standpoint of the Cartesian sceptic's own self-understanding of the nature of his conclusion, we *appear* to be faced with a scene of destruction as long as we permit the sceptical conclusion to remain unchallenged. But *that* appearance is not one that Wittgenstein, on Cavell's own reading of him, will be prepared to let go unchallenged. The continuation of the remark from the *Investigations* (PI 118) to which Cavell here alludes is one that he himself has insisted is best translated: 'What we are destroying is nothing but structures of air...' (see, for example, Cavell 1979 p. xvii). The radicalisation of the Cartesian problematic represented in Kantian scepticism moves us in the direction of such a realisation. Of course, as long as it continues to appear – as it does to a Kantian sceptic such as Kripkenstein – as if our everyday concepts of thought, understanding, meaning, etc. are without application and thus themselves nothing but mere structures of air, then the treatment of scepticism will, for Wittgenstein, not yet be complete. That treatment will not be complete until our criteria for the application of those concepts are recovered. But it does not follow, as Cavell seems to suggest, that such a Kantian radicalisation of the Cartesian problematic cannot form a part of that treatment.

37 One can think of these two movements that Wittgenstein seeks to execute as

the *movement up the dialectical ladder* (towards nonsense) and the *movement down the dialectical ladder* (towards the ordinary). This way of putting things helps to bring out both a fundamental moment of continuity and a fundamental moment of discontinuity between Wittgenstein's early and later philosophical practice. The former of these two remarks could serve equally aptly as a characterisation of the aim of the author the *Tractatus*. The latter could not. What I am here calling 'the Wittgensteinian way' is therefore meant to designate a way with scepticism that we first find only when we turn to Wittgenstein's later writings.

- 38 Cavell, if he were brought to see how McDowell is employing the term 'criterion', could concede, without harm to any of his philosophical commitments, something along the following lines: 'Well, that is not how Wittgenstein uses the term; but if you are determined to use the term in this (un-Wittgensteinian) way, then the right (i.e. *philosophically* Wittgensteinian) thing to go on and say, so using it, is just what you say (e.g. that in cases of pretending the criteria for pain are only apparently satisfied).' And McDowell, equally, if he were taught Cavell's understanding of the term (criteria are not criteria for something's *being* so, but for its *being so*) would have no reason not to concede that the right thing to say, so using the term, is just what Cavell says (i.e. that in cases of pretending, if it is *pain* you are pretending to be in, then the criteria for pain are satisfied). The disagreement between Cavell and McDowell about criteria is a further instance of a merely apparent disagreement in which the appearance of disagreement is engendered through an unacknowledged transition from a Cartesian to a Kantian problematic. Both McDowell and Cavell are in profound disagreement with their respective and very similar sets of interlocutors (Baker, Wright, Albritton, Malcolm, etc.), but they are disagreeing with them about different things. (McDowell's point has to do with how justification and knowledge are internally – and not merely externally – related to one another; Cavell's has to do with how an appeal to criteria cannot do a sort of work that Wittgenstein calls upon it to do, if criteria are understood in the manner of such commentators.) Their respective focal philosophical motivations for disagreeing with such commentators are perfectly compatible. This is not to deny that the differences here in what they have to say about Wittgenstein's response to scepticism may be tied to substantive differences in the details of their respective understandings of the character of that response. It is only to insist that these differences can be assessed only after we appreciate that what the one here affirms and the other here denies (in affirming and denying that, in the case of someone's pretending to be in pain, the criteria for pain are satisfied) are not the same thing.
- 39 It is worth noting that nothing McDowell says anywhere, as far as I can see, ever denies the importance of such a return (and thus the sort of attention to the ordinary upon which Cavell places so much emphasis in his reading of Wittgenstein). Indeed, much of what McDowell says would seem to presuppose it.
- 40 As should be evident to anyone familiar with their work, the project of this chapter is pervasively indebted to the writings of Stanley Cavell, John McDowell, and Hilary Putnam. This particular version of the chapter, as it appears here, is indebted to Denis McManus – both for his suggestions about how to organise and edit it and for his forbearance with its author.

# SOLIPSISM AND SCEPTICISM IN THE *TRACTATUS*

*Denis McManus*

## 1 Some textual clues

In searching the work of Wittgenstein for a means to meet the challenge of scepticism, the writings to which most attention has been directed are his discussions of the possibility of a private language and the notes published as *On Certainty*. But already in the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein seems to have had a settled and damning opinion of scepticism:

Scepticism is *not* irrefutable, but palpably senseless, if it would doubt where a question cannot be asked.

For doubt can only exist where there is a question; a question only where there is an answer, and this only where something *can* be *said*.

(TLP 6.51)

Despite their stridency, Wittgenstein's early remarks on scepticism are brief and gnomic. But there are other clues that are available to us. Hacker (1986: 78–9) has suggested that TLP 6.51 is a riposte to a claim in Russell's 1914 Lowell lectures, published as *Our Knowledge of the External World*:

Universal scepticism, though logically irrefutable, is practically barren; it can only, therefore, give a certain flavour of hesitancy to our beliefs, and cannot be used to substitute other beliefs for them.

(Russell 1914b: 71)<sup>1</sup>

The remarks which follow 6.51's notebook formulation provide further support for Hacker's suggestion:

All theories that say: 'This is how it must be, otherwise we could not philosophise' or 'otherwise we surely could not live', etc., etc., must of course disappear.

My method is not to sunder the hard from the soft, but to see the hardness of the soft.

(NB 44)

In the Lowell lectures, Russell distinguishes ‘hard’ and ‘soft data’ (p. 75), the former being ‘primarily the facts of sense (*i.e.* of *our own* sense-data) and the laws of logic’ (p. 76), the latter including ‘the belief . . . that sensible objects in general persist when we are not perceiving them’ (p. 77). For Russell, the ‘hardness’ of ‘hard data’ is that we cannot really doubt them; we may think we can but we are only engaging in ‘*verbal* doubt’, ‘when what is nominally being doubted is not really in our thoughts, and only words are actually present to our minds’ (p. 75). In the same lecture, Russell argues that since there is no ‘standpoint from which to criticise the whole of the knowledge of daily life’, ‘[t]he most that can be done is to examine and purify our common knowledge by an internal scrutiny’ (p. 71). The upshot is a theory of precisely the sort that Wittgenstein says must ‘disappear’:

While admitting that doubt is possible with regard to all our common knowledge, we must nevertheless accept that knowledge in the main if philosophy is to be possible at all.

(pp. 70–1)

Another interesting interpretative clue can be found in Waismann’s notes on conversations with Wittgenstein (dating probably from late 1929 or early 1930), where he gives what sounds very much like an elaboration on 6.51. 6.51 can sound like a dogmatic insistence that all questions are answerable, but these remarks suggest another construal:

A question is an invitation to look for something. . . . To understand a question means to know what kind of proposition the answer will be. Without an answer our thoughts do not point in any direction; there is no question. We cannot look for something if we do not look for it in a certain direction.

(VC 227)

These remarks begin to give some sense of why scepticism is ‘palpably senseless, if it would doubt where a question cannot be asked’. Where ‘there is no question’, ‘our thoughts do not point in any direction’. But ‘[w]e cannot look for something if we do not look for it in a certain direction’. What Wittgenstein would seem to be claiming then is that the sceptic denies himself thoughts with a direction; in doing so, the sceptic would also lose the possibility of doubt – the suspicion that our search for answers has failed – since we never had a direction to search in anyway. If these comments do elaborate on 6.51, a reading of that remark will need to explain why we might think that this is what scepticism does.

Quite what Wittgenstein has in mind when 6.51 talks about ‘scepticism’ is unclear. What Russell had in mind in the Lowell lectures was a reasonably conventional Cartesian scepticism about our knowledge of the external world. But I would suggest that the *Tractatus* addresses ‘sceptical doubts about the existence of the world’ in a ‘thinner’ sense, according to which these doubts represent doubts about the existence of that domain about which we think. The doubts that Russell rejects are only one form that such doubts could take.<sup>2</sup> Why accept this reading of 6.51’s ‘scepticism’? Pears has argued plausibly that the *Tractatus* is unconcerned with problems – such as Russell’s – that philosophers have seen as emerging out of ‘the supposed opaqueness of sense-data’ (Pears 1996: 127). Certainly if such problems were the *Tractatus*’s target, it provides very little by way of argued criticism that takes them as a *specific* target.<sup>3</sup>

But my fundamental reasons for favouring this reading are embodied in the two possible interpretations of Wittgenstein’s remarks on scepticism that this chapter sketches. Both propose that underlying the sceptic’s worries about our knowledge of the world are deeper questions about the very intelligibility of that world. On a familiar construal of the *Tractatus*, that work provides what I will call a ‘realist’ answer to those questions. Another set of answers could be seen to inform Wittgenstein’s apparent sympathy for solipsism and my first interpretation of his criticism of scepticism turns on the supposed need for a superior, solipsistic metaphysics of subjectivity. However, I will argue ultimately that the *Tractatus* is best understood as casting doubt on whether a clear sense can be ascribed to these deeper questions of intelligibility. This second, ‘therapeutic’ reading, based upon an interpretation of Wittgenstein’s invocation of ‘internal relations’, suggests that his solipsistic formulations ought to be compared to rungs of a ladder to be climbed and then discarded: what our coming to those ‘conclusions’ demonstrates is that the questions to which a solipsistic (or indeed a realist) metaphysics would provide answers are confused. From this perspective, the sceptic is doubly confused: first, he fails to see how the metaphysics of subjectivity that he endorses forces upon him these questions of intelligibility; second, these questions, which he cannot avoid (though we perhaps can), are confused.

## 2 Knowledge, intelligibility and con-formity

Post-Cartesian philosophy has characteristically taken its bearings by sceptical questions concerning whether we have real knowledge of the external world, other minds, the past, etc. But there is reason to believe that when we worry that our thoughts about the external world, say, might be false, we presuppose an answer to what I will call the ‘question of intelligibility’: how must our thoughts and that world be constituted for it to be possible for the former to represent or misrepresent the latter? One of the most basic thoughts of philosophy can be seen as an answer to that question: that

thoughts and the world share ‘forms’, with the ‘intelligibility’ of thought imagined as something like a fit, an isomorphism, between the ‘form of thought’ and the ‘form of the world’. The latter refers not to the particular way in which, as a matter of contingent fact, the world happens to be: its being, for instance, one in which there happens to be a blue pen on the table in front of me, the ‘form of the world’ to which the thought, ‘There is a blue pen on the table in front of me’, could be said to correspond in the sense of ‘being *true of*’, while the thought, ‘There is a black pen on the table in front of me’, could not. Instead the ‘form of the world’ refers to something that might also be called the world’s ‘possibilities’: the objects that happen to exist within it, as well as those that could happen to exist in it, belonging to certain fundamental kinds, possessing certain fundamental or essential properties and standing to one another in certain fundamental or essential relations. In the relevant senses of ‘form’ and ‘correspondence’, the ‘form’ of the thought, ‘There is a black pen on the table in front of me’, would ‘correspond’ to the ‘form’ of the world in which there happens to be a blue pen on the table in front of me in that that thought embodies a false but nonetheless intelligible claim about that world, articulating another way that the world might have been and reflecting, in some sense, the kinds of objects that might be found in that world, the kinds of properties that those objects might be found to have and the kinds of relation in which that they might be found to stand. I will call this conception of intelligibility that of ‘intelligibility as con-formity’. To ask how exactly one ought to understand the key notions it involves – ‘contingency’, ‘possibility’, ‘kind’, ‘being fundamental’ and ‘being essential’ – is obviously to raise large, and fundamental, philosophical questions. For now, I take it that anyone familiar with a little philosophy has a rough sense for how these notions are meant to be understood here.

A question that the conception of intelligibility as con-formity may now raise is how thought and world come to have common forms, a question I will call the ‘question of acquired con-formity’. The question is not one of how a thought comes to be true of a particular fact but one of how a thought comes to be the kind of thing that is capable of being true or false of a particular fact. What we seek is an account of the seemingly manifest fact that we *can* think about the world, this feat understood as the existence of a con-formity between our thoughts and the world.

Answers to the ‘question of acquired con-formity’ come in two very broad kinds: what I will call ‘realist views’, which state that the form of the world (somehow) dictates that of thought, and what I will call ‘idealist views’, which state that the form of thought (somehow) dictates that of the world. To illustrate the latter option: in a world that a god has created, ideas do not represent a peculiar mark of thinkers, as unthinking objects too were created to instantiate particular ideas which that god possessed. The notion that there might be a correspondence between thought and object is now given sense by the fact that they are both informed (literally ‘en-formed’) by

ideas: objects by the creator god's ideas, but ideas nonetheless to which the thinker's might then be suited to correspond. As the realisation of certain thoughts, the objects we think about are formed in a way that makes them ready or suited for thought.

One reason why philosophers sometimes embrace the characteristic metaphysical extravagance of idealism is realism's inability to answer what I will call the 'question of concept acquisition'. If the con-formity of thought and world is what allows the former to embody intelligible claims about the latter, then that con-formity is a necessary presupposition of, and thus cannot be brought about through, observation of the contents of that world. So, for example, an understanding of what it is for something to be a table cannot be gathered a posteriori through observing tables. As Sellars puts it:

[I]nstead of coming to have a concept of something because we have noticed that sort of thing, to have the ability to notice a sort of thing is already to have the concept of that sort of thing, and cannot account for it.

(Sellars 1956: Section 10)<sup>4</sup>

### 3 Wittgenstein on signs, symbols and intelligibility as con-formity

The early pages of the *Tractatus* may be read as presenting, first, a set of metaphysical theses – according to which the world is constituted by the totality of facts and facts are constituted by arrangements of objects – and, second, the view that what allows thoughts to describe facts is an isomorphism between the objects that make up facts and the elements that make up thoughts. If objects had a different form, different facts would have been possible, different propositions would have made sense and different thoughts would have been thinkable.<sup>5</sup> Names, when correctly – which is to say, meaningfully – used, are combined in ways that reflect the combinatorial possibilities of the objects that they name; doing so endows the propositions that those names make up with logical forms that mirror those of possible facts.

Implicit here is part of what sounds like a realist story of acquired con-formity: metaphysical characteristics of the world serve as a standard to which the 'form' of meaningful talk is answerable. The element of a realist story that is missing is any explanation of how that con-formity comes about. Without worrying about that yet, let us consider just what kind of success or failure the match or mismatch envisaged is meant to embody.<sup>6</sup> One possible interpretation is that the ways in which we use colour vocabulary, for example, is subject to a kind of external discipline; for instance, our never describing anything as 'red and green all over' might be said to reflect the fact that there are no possible facts corresponding to that combination of words. Our uses of colour vocabulary would then be seen as meaningful by virtue of their con-formity with the world's possibilities.<sup>7</sup>

But there are confusions at work here which I would suggest Wittgenstein is actually trying to expose and which underpin the notion of intelligibility as con-formity.<sup>8</sup> Consider for a moment ‘sound vocabulary’ or ‘length vocabulary’. Do the forms of propositions constructed using these other collections of words – ‘sound propositions’ and ‘length propositions’ – correspond to those of possible colour facts? There seems to be no reason to think that they should. But why, when we imagine the forms of such propositions as lacking an isomorphism with the forms of these possible facts, do we see these *failures* of fit as no threat to their meaningful use? In thinking of a proposition’s being capable of meaningful use as a matter of its con-formity with that of a possible fact, it seems that we must, at the same time, discount the notion that this proposition is subject to the external discipline of conforming to an indefinite number of other possible facts: we must not end up declaring our sound propositions confused by their failure to con-form with possible colour facts.

The natural response for the con-formist would seem to be to say that these propositions were never meant to represent these other kinds of possible fact; their forms are simply irrelevant to the meaningfulness of those propositions. But is this natural response available to him? Note some of the expressions just used – ‘propositions that were never *meant* to describe such and such’, ‘forms that simply aren’t *relevant* to such and such a proposition’. But how does one determine what the proposition is *meant* to describe, which possible facts have forms that are *relevant* to it? Only, I would argue, by presupposing the meaning of the propositions to be tested; we have taken for granted what it is that they apply to and what they do not apply to, and thus also the ‘meaningfulness’ that we were meant to be investigating, the question of whether they ‘can’ indeed be applied.<sup>9</sup> To judge the goodness of a proposition’s con-formity with the world’s possibilities, which possibilities are relevant must already be determined. But what determines that is precisely the sense of the proposition, and we must somehow overlook this embarrassing fact when we imagine this con-formity or its absence as imposing an external discipline on the ways in which we talk. Our thinking runs then in a circle.

In the preface of the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein claims that ‘the problems of philosophy’ and their ‘method of formulation [*Fragestellung*]’ rest ‘on the misunderstanding of the logic of our language’. At TLP 3.324, he proposes that ‘the most fundamental confusions (of which the whole of philosophy is full)’ arise out of a failure to respect the distinction between what he labels ‘signs’ and ‘symbols’:

The sign is the part of the symbol perceptible by the senses.

Two different symbols can therefore have the same sign (the written sign or the sound sign) in common – they then signify in different ways.

It can never indicate the common characteristic of two objects that we symbolise them with the same signs but by different *methods of symbolising*. For the sign is arbitrary. We could therefore equally well choose two different signs and where then would be what was common in the symbolisation?

(TLP 3.32–3.322)

While ‘[i]n order to recognise the symbol in the sign we must consider the significant use’ (TLP 3.326), signs denote, roughly speaking, the mere ‘dead’ signs, the physical marks on paper or sounds in the air.

This distinction can help articulate the confusion behind the con-formist story I sketched above. No one thinks that one might discover rules for the use of signs, rules regarding how a physical mark on a page ought to figure in or as a proposition: ‘the sign is arbitrary’ (TLP 3.322). Such ‘dead’ signs can be used however one wants and thus ‘[w]e cannot give a sign the wrong sense’ (TLP 5.4732). If instead we are contemplating a string of signs with a particular meaning – a symbol – then there is a set of possible facts which they serve to articulate and their meaningful use is a matter of their being used in that way. But this is no *external* determination of how these words *ought* to be used as we are only considering – are only led to – those particular possible facts because we have taken for granted how these words *are* actually used. When considered as symbols, we take for granted how the words in question ought to be used; consequently, that cannot be seen as a matter *to be determined* by reference to some con-formity between their use and the form of possible facts.<sup>10</sup> The ‘external discipline’ to which we imagined our propositions were to be subjected is an illusion which looms before us only if we take the meaning, and hence ‘meaningfulness’,<sup>11</sup> of those propositions for granted. We generate the illusion by disconnecting words from their customary use while at the same time keeping that use at the back of our minds. In other words, we treat these words simultaneously as signs and as symbols.

#### 4 Doesn’t the subject bind language to the world?

The argument of the preceding section shows that in thinking of words’ ‘meaningfulness’ as a matter of con-formity we have always already taken their meaning for granted. A gloss that one might be tempted to place on this outcome is that we must take for granted that our language ‘works’. Although section 9 will argue that this gloss too harbours a confusion that Wittgenstein may be trying to expose, it does at least suggest one natural reading of Wittgenstein’s early slogan that there is an ‘internal relation of depicting that holds between language and the world’ (TLP 4.014), the suggestion being that there is no possibility of ‘getting between’ language and world so as somehow to ‘ground’ or ‘understand’ their relatedness. This suggestion invites two obvious objections and in the present and following

sections I will explain how reflection on those can lead us to an interpretation of Wittgenstein's apparent sympathy for solipsism.

The first objection is: 'Surely it is the Subject that "makes language work"; surely *we* put the meaning into words, rather than their possessing it all by themselves.' Some have seen just such a view in the *Tractatus* (in the 3s in particular). According to Hacker, for example, Wittgenstein believed that 'psychological processes link language to reality' (Hacker 1996: 23):

Content is . . . injected into the constituent names of a propositional sign by mental acts of meaning, and the resultant proposition then represents a state of affairs.

(ibid.: 683)

The obvious objection to such a view is, as Hacker recognises, that it 'merely replaces the puzzle about the semantic properties of sign-language with a mystery about the semantic properties of the language of thought' (ibid.: 25). If we imagine a 'method of projection' (TLP 3.11), 'linking' name and object, which the thinker recognises and acts on and thereby *guides* the application of the name, we are presupposing that the thinker can see in particular cases whether an entity in front of it is the relevant kind of entity to which, according to the method of projection, the name applies. Beneath our dissatisfaction with this account of the guidedness of language, 'the question of concept acquisition' is at work: the understanding embodied in our use of a name is fundamentally the same kind of understanding that we take for granted in invoking the thinker's capacity to recognise relevant objects. Hence, an invocation of the latter will not explain what puzzled us about the former.

According to Hacker, Wittgenstein believed this problem could be evaded on the grounds that 'mental acts possess intrinsic intentionality' (1996: 681), though 'Wittgenstein was later to realize' that this view 'is irremediably flawed' (ibid.: 24). I will argue instead that the *Tractatus* can be read as confronting rather than ducking the problem set out above and as seeing in it the need to abandon any image of the Subject as the active entity that 'makes language happen'.

## 5 Learning symbols

The second objection I will consider to the proposal that 'language and world are internally related' is: 'If that is so, and the relation is not mediated by, for example, the Subject, how then do we *learn* language?'

Let us first consider the difference between learning a first language and learning a second language. If we leave aside some interesting subtleties, the latter can be seen as a matter of learning a collection of contingent facts about *signs*, learning that a language uses particular signs to express what is expressed in one's first language by other particular signs. But what hap-

pens when we learn a first language? It cannot be the same kind of process, because that process presupposes our mastery of a first language. Shockingly, the *Tractatus* seems to assert that there is an incoherence in the very idea of explaining a first language, of explaining not signs but symbols. It does so vividly, and twice:

The meaning of primitive signs can be explained by elucidations. Elucidations are propositions which contain the primitive signs. They can, therefore, only be understood when the meanings of these signs are already known.

(TLP 3.263)

The meanings of the simple signs (the words) must be explained to us, if we are to understand them.

However, it is by means of propositions that we explain ourselves.  
[*Mit den Saetzen aber verstaendigen wir uns.*]

(TLP 4.026)<sup>12</sup>

A passage from *Philosophical Remarks* could be offered as explicating the moral of these perplexing observations:

[T]his means that any kind of explanation of language presupposes a language already. And in a certain sense, the use of language is something that cannot be taught. . . . I cannot use language to get outside language.

(PR 54)

But something very like this thought can also be found in an important, early *Notebook* entry too:

How can I be *told how* the proposition represents? Or can this not be *said* to me at all? And if that is so can I '*know*' it? If it was supposed to be said to me, then this would have to be done by means of a proposition; but the proposition could only shew it.

What can be said can only be said by means of a proposition, and so nothing that is necessary for the understanding of *all* propositions can be said.

(NB 25)

All explanations of propositions terminate at some point in our simply *seeing* what a proposition shows and that will be a matter of our *already* understanding the world in the terms in which that proposition represents it. The most obvious candidate for the role of an 'explanation' which would 'get outside

language' is the giving of an ostensive definition. If we imagine learning a *sign* in that way, we imagine learning that this word, 'X', is used to refer to what my first language calls 'red', say. But if we imagined that an ostensive definition might teach someone a *symbol*, a first-language expression, as it were, we confront the question of concept acquisition again: in order to see *what* is being pointed at, the pupil must already have a mastery of the relevant symbol, which is precisely what the 'explanation' was to 'make possible'.<sup>13</sup> In other words, ostensive definitions will 'only be understood when the meanings of [the signs they contain] are already known' (TLP 3.263), or as the *Philosophical Investigations* later put it, 'when the overall role of the word in language is clear' (PI 30).<sup>14</sup>

This suggests a reading for Wittgenstein's 'key' to solipsism (TLP 5.62), '*The limits of my language* mean the limits of my world' (TLP 5.6). Our using the particular symbols that we use cannot itself be understood as a response to 'how the world is'. Nor can new symbols be explained to me by presenting me with entities of the type that such symbols pick out. In this way, the limits of my world – understood as the range of kinds of events that I might experience, involving the range of entities I might encounter in the range of circumstances I might encounter – coincide with the limits of the language I understand – understood as the total set of symbols of which I have mastery. Anything I might experience – anything that might happen in my world – must be articulated within my language and no experience of mine might teach me a new symbol, might expand 'the language I understand'.

This in turn suggests a reading now for the proposition 'the world is *my* world' (TLP 5.62), which Wittgenstein proposes 'shows itself' in the remark that is the key to solipsism. To adapt the comment from TLP 5.552 on coming to understand logic, 'the "experience" that we need to understand [a symbol] is not that such and such is the case, but that something *is*; but that is *no* experience'. In the light of the explanatory failures identified above, one might say that the world is my world in that that space within which I may experience events coming to pass must always already be available to me; it must be so because there is no experience that could be my coming to find it.

We are led to the same place by section 4's recognition of the futility of invoking the Subject as an explanation of the representational capacity of language, as knowing '*how* the proposition represents'. The 'explanation' we imagine only 'works' if we think of the Subject as possessing 'intrinsic intentionality'. When we recognise that this *explanans* takes for granted a fundamentally similar capacity to that which puzzled us, the Subject must be hauled down from the 'management role' to which we were tempted to assign it; the Subject is in the same boat as that which it pretended to manage, the words it might be thought to 'animate'.<sup>15</sup> To extend the gloss with which section 4 began (but upon which section 9 will cast doubt), one might say that, like language, the Subject is 'internally related' to the world it 'is about'. The sovereign Subject that is capable of stepping back from – standing at a dis-

tance from – that world and its capacity to grasp that world vanishes: ‘there is no such thing’ as ‘[t]he thinking, presenting subject’ (TLP 5.631) if that is meant to be conceivable in isolation from the world that it thinks about. Instead, the Subject, one might say, is face to face with – in an ungroundable immediacy with – the world; the Subject finds itself in the midst of – *belonging to* – that world. Thinker and world are internally-related, the Subject *constituted* by its relation to its world: ‘I am my world’ (TLP 5.63).

## 6 Is solipsism a solution to the puzzle?

The fact that our using the particular symbols that we use cannot itself be understood as a response to ‘how the world is’ illustrates the earlier proposal that con-formity cannot be explained by my bringing my thought into con-formity with the world. This leaves the question of acquired con-formity unanswered. What the con-formist seems to need is a speculative metaphysical solution, perhaps along the following lines: since we know that we can think, and that the possibility of our thinking requires that it and the world con-form, we must conclude that this con-formity exists; the unanswerability of the question of concept acquisition reveals that that con-formity must be prior to, not observable in, but making possible, our ordinary experiences; therefore, prior to – and necessary for the possibility of – all that experience might reveal is a deeper kinship between thinker and world – myself, my thoughts and their subject-matter must all be, in some sense, aspects of ‘one world soul’ (NB 49). For example, if ideas, in some sense, constitute the world, then both the world and I are informed by ideas and our con-formity will have a basis. Such a metaphysics would answer the question, ‘How is it that thought is possible?’, as it so manifestly would seem to be (‘I think therefore it is possible to think!’) and our formulation of these very panic-inducing arguments would seem to require. So, since sections 4 and 5 have suggested that Wittgenstein sees the realist’s question of concept acquisition as unanswerable and that such a realisation naturally expresses itself in solipsistic terms, might we go one more step and ascribe to him a solipsistic metaphysics?

To recall our over-arching objective, such an interpretation would give a clear sense to Wittgenstein’s remarks on scepticism in that such a metaphysics has an immediate and clear consequence for scepticism about the existence of the domain about which we think, namely, that the sceptic’s conclusion rests on an incorrect metaphysics of thought. If ‘I am my world’, then the sceptic, in contemplating the possibility that that world might not exist, is contemplating a situation in which the Subject would be denied not merely knowledge but the very medium of its existence too: the sceptic is asking for a proof of the existence of something without which his doubts could not so much as be possible. Thus, the sceptic tries to ‘doubt where a question cannot be asked’. Such a perspective on scepticism could be seen as

revealing ‘the hardness of the soft’ in that ‘doubts about the existence of the world’ would lack ‘direction’, would fail to pose a question; since ‘doubt can only exist where there is a question’, the sceptic is engaging in no more than ‘verbal doubt’. As a result, theories which would resolve this doubt ‘must of course disappear’, though this would have itself been made clear by developing a superior, metaphysical theory of thought.<sup>16</sup>

But conspicuously, Wittgenstein talks not of solipsism as being true but of ‘the extent [to which] solipsism is a truth’, since ‘what solipsism *means*, is quite correct, only it cannot be *said*, but it shows itself.’ (TLP 5.62). And, of course, the proposal that thinker and world are ‘internally related’ belongs to a book whose author compares its propositions to a ladder to be climbed and then thrown away (TLP 6.54). Nevertheless, the preceding paragraph does not strike me as expressing an obviously mistaken interpretation: quite what Wittgenstein’s sympathy for solipsism amounts to and quite how it is qualified, not least by TLP 6.54’s pronouncement, are questions that run to the heart of the difficulty of reading the *Tractatus* and, if one is comfortable with the notion that that work offers a metaphysics but one which is ineffable, then it would take little further effort to develop interpretations of Wittgenstein’s opaque qualifications to his admiration for solipsism that might make just as much sense as that notion.<sup>17</sup> All the same, I will not develop the above reading of his reaction to scepticism further. Instead I will sketch a second reading that draws on a ‘therapeutic’ interpretation of his response to solipsism, according to which Wittgenstein wishes to expose as confused the question to which solipsism is a proposed answer. A crucial question that such a reading must answer is: how can Wittgenstein criticise the sceptic for asking ‘questions without direction’ if he does not offer a rival metaphysics of thought?

## 7 Internal relations and the ladder to be thrown away

There are some propositions of the *Tractatus* that seem straightforwardly meant: 3.324’s claim about the place of the role of sign/symbol confusions in philosophy, for example. So which propositions does he ask us to ‘climb’ and then ‘throw away’? Amongst the most likely candidates seem to be those that invoke the notions of ‘internal property’ and ‘internal relation’ since the coherence of these notions seems questionable.<sup>18</sup> If internal relations are defined as those which it is ‘unthinkable’ that the relata might lack (TLP 4.123), then one has no grasp of the relata, nor then of the sense of this ‘assertion’ concerning them, if one has not already recognised the ‘truth’ of this ‘assertion’; to understand which entities the ‘assertion’ describes one must already appreciate what the ‘assertion’ says. Correspondingly, if we try to imagine someone who might learn what such an ‘assertion’ ‘asserts’, by virtue of being someone who was yet to ‘learn of’ the relationship it asserts, such a person could not have had a genuine understanding of the entities

in the first place, or, therefore, of this ‘assertion’ about them.<sup>19</sup> So what is someone who, like Wittgenstein, asserts the holding of an internal relation doing? I will develop the proposal just sketched that such an assertion would represent an item of news only for the confused.

Let us consider a case one could describe as the ‘discovery of an internal relation’. Imagine an observer of a set of races. At the end of the day, he presents his findings about these races, foremost of which is his discovery that, in every race, the person who crossed the finish line first also won the race. How would we characterise his confusion? One might say that he has mistakenly taken the relation between crossing the line first and winning as an *external* relation. One might correct him by saying that that relation is instead an internal one. But this response may give a wrong impression of the nature of his confusion. It suggests that he answered a question incorrectly, that the wrong answer is that a particular external relation holds when the right answer is that a particular internal relation holds. But the person’s root problem is that he asked his question in the first place. His ‘question’ was itself expressive of a misunderstanding; the whole ‘business’ he is in, one might say, is wrong-headed in taking it that there is an issue to be investigated here. One can investigate whether a Russian always wins but that does not mean that there is an issue to be investigated expressed by the similar-sounding sentence, ‘Does the person who crosses the line first always win?’<sup>20</sup>

To understand the point of saying ‘crossing the line first and winning are internally related’ is to be able to think one’s way into the confused perspective and to be able to see how it is confused. The person who learns by hearing the assertion of an internal relation is someone who has been confused and what they learn is that there is nothing to learn where they thought there was (or alternatively that there is no *where*).<sup>21</sup> One way to make the point would be to say that the person who understands an assertion of an internal relation is someone who sees that – and how – they aren’t *assertions* and that it would be confusion rather than simply error to think that they are.<sup>22</sup> What the inquirer needs to learn is not the answer to his question but how confusion has made him construct his pseudo-question; he needs to learn not ‘how things are’ but how a misunderstanding brought him to imagine he dimly saw a ‘how things are’, a matter on which one might hold views, true or false. In the *Wizard of Oz*, the Straw Man imagines being able to tell us ‘why the ocean’s near the shore’. What he really needs to learn – what ‘getting a brain’ might let him see – is that there isn’t a why – and not because it’s a *mystery* or because the ocean sometimes *isn’t* near the shore!<sup>23</sup>

## 8 Illusions of possible explanation and an internal relatedness of names and objects

Can the *Tractatus*’ ‘assertions’ that certain ‘internal relations’ hold be understood in this way also, that is, not as articulating perplexing answers to

difficult questions but as indicative of situations in which we face things that look like ‘questions’ but which we do not really understand? I will give one brief, roughly-sketched illustration<sup>24</sup> before turning to the solipsistic ‘internal relation’ of Subject and world.

A cat on a mat and a cup on a saucer could be said to ‘con-form’ in such a way that, for example, we might establish a system of representation in which we use the cup as a name for the cat: we place the cup on the saucer to indicate that the cat is on the mat; we take it off the saucer to indicate that the cat is not on the mat. The cup seems to ‘have possibilities’, one might say, that mirror the cat’s. Moreover, the mirroring in question does not seem to be an incidental feature of the cup and the cat. It would seem to be unthinkable for these entities to lose the ‘forms’ by virtue of which this mirroring holds and still be the entities that they are. Thus, their possessing mirroring forms would seem to be a matter of their being ‘internally related’ to one another. Perhaps we see here that there must be ‘an internal relation between the logical form of a name and that of the object that it names’. And perhaps that captures a substantial condition that a particular part of the world imposes on how representations of it must be ‘formed’.

But we give ourselves that impression only, I would suggest, if we allow ourselves to forget how we have helped ourselves to the ‘forms’ in question, that is, only by already conceiving of the object under a particular aspect and already having at the back of our mind a particular use for the name. Note first that we see the cat as, say, sat-on-the-mat-as-opposed-to-three-feet-to-the-left-of-it, and do not consider it as two-years-old-as-opposed-to-three-years-old, Siamese-as-opposed-to-Persian or my-cat-as-opposed-to-your-cat; similarly, we see the cup as on-top-of-the-saucer-as-opposed-to-three-inches-to-the-left-of-it and do not consider its age, maker or owner. *Now* we have an object and a name whose ‘forms’ ‘correspond’, so that we might represent the cat’s position through our positioning of the cup; but it is only by virtue of having had the same kind of ‘logical space’ projected onto them, a ‘space’ which neither ‘demanded’, a space which is not simply ‘there to be found’ – naturally occurring – around either.

One might respond by saying that the competing conceptualisations alluded to actually pick out quite different objects. But this takes us to the crux: the impression that there is the basis here for a con-formist explanation of sensible representation by reference to characteristics of the represented object turns, I would suggest, on a certain equivocation over the word, ‘object’. First, we conceive of ‘the object’ as an independently-constituted entity whose characteristics we read off, rather than decide, and which we pick out as ‘*that*’, with a pointing finger perhaps. But, second, we also conceive of ‘the object’ as a cat-in-a-particular-spatial-location-as-opposed-to-another-spatial-location, rather than as a cat-as-opposed-to-a-member-of-another-species, and so on. We can attach no sense to our cup ‘corresponding’ to the ‘object’ understood in the first sense and the ‘object’ understood in the

second sense fails to provide an *independent* determinant of the dimension in which we ought to speak or think. The con-formist philosopher's 'solution' is to overlook the difference between these two 'objects' – invoking the cat-on-its-mat when he wants to demonstrate the 'correspondence' of name to object and the formless *that* when he wishes to demonstrate that what is on offer is a genuinely independent determinant of how the words ought to be used.

To hear as a discovery that 'the first across the line always wins' is to overlook how we come to describe someone as the winner, namely, precisely by seeing who crosses the line first. Similarly, the 'remarkable correspondence' of name and object only arises when we characterise them using 'corresponding' 'logical spaces'. One might then say that name and object are 'internally related'. But this directs us not to some novel kind of explanation of how the name must be used. Rather, it is understood by someone who sees that it is by confusing two superficially overlapping frameworks that we conjure up the impression of a substantial 'con-formity' that the named imposes on what names it. To grasp what the person who offers such an 'elucidation' is getting at is to cease to believe or disbelieve 'what it says'; instead what the person had thought he was being offered a view on no longer looks like an issue at all.

There is much more to be said about this example and about the general notions of 'internal property' and 'internal relation'. But what I will turn to next is how this section's discussion might offer a reinterpretation of the proposal that thinker and world are 'internally related'.

## 9 Solipsism, internal relations and the sign/symbol hybrid

If the truth in (not *of*) solipsism is the truth in (not *of*) the assertion of an internal relation, section 7 suggests that the person who hears the assertion in question – 'what the solipsist says' – *as an assertion*, as articulating a position on an issue, has yet to see what the person who offers this 'assertion' means: their offering that assertion is meant to throw into relief a contextualising confusion in our thought. My suggestion is that that context is the confused notion of intelligibility as con-formity and that the truth *in* solipsism – 'what solipsism means' – 'shows itself' when we find ourselves unable to imagine con-formity or its absence between propositions and world without taking for granted the meaning of the propositions in question. The conclusion we should then draw is that we have not given sense to this notion of language 'working' or of the associated notions of our thinking 'making sense' or 'being possible'.

'What solipsism means', which Wittgenstein describes as something that 'shows itself', is, I would suggest, what the argument of section 3 shows. 'What solipsism says' emerged in that argument at the point at which that ar-

gument revealed a circularity in our thinking. What is misleading about the gloss on that argument which section 4 opened with (that it demonstrates that ‘language and world are internally related’) and section 5 developed (that it demonstrates that ‘Subject and world are internally related’) is that it presents as conclusions of that argument what are really interim conclusions, our arrival at which demonstrates that our thinking which led us to those very interim conclusions is confused.

What the argument of section 3 actually demonstrates is that, *when* we puzzle over the con-formity of language and world, we must take for granted the meaning of the words whose use we are imagining con-forming or failing to con-form with the form of the world. *In the course of thinking through this (confused) project*, we find that we are obliged to take for granted what that project conceives of as the ‘meaningfulness’ of our language. But that does not imply that we, *when ‘outside’ of that project*, must take our propositions *as meaningful*, that we cannot question their con-formity to reality. That would leave in place the contextualising ‘assumption’ that it is Wittgenstein’s concern to shift: that ‘intelligibility as con-formity’ has a clear sense. If it does not, then we are confused when we think of ‘it’ as an issue that one might question (whether and how language and world con-form) or as something that must be taken for granted (as something internal to the constitution of a proposition). The work of the argument of section 3 is to demonstrate that we have not assigned sense to this ‘intelligibility’, to this ‘con-formity’, whether it ‘holds’ or ‘does not hold’, whether it is an ‘external’ or ‘internal property’, whether ‘the Subject con-forms to the world’ (as the realist thinks) or ‘the world con-forms to the Subject’ (as an idealist, such as the solipsist, thinks).

The conclusion of the argument of section 3 is that, unless we *surreptitiously* rely on the meaning of the proposition in question, we cannot fill out our story of the ‘intelligibility’ of a proposition as a matter of its con-formity to a possible fact. The argument could be seen as revealing how (to modify TLP 5.64) realism – which would hold the form of reality over the form of thought as a standard to which the latter must be brought to con-form – leads to solipsism if it is strictly thought through. But realism does not lead us there to leave us there. The fact that our strictly thought-through realism has turned out to rest upon a solipsism demonstrates that something went wrong somewhere, that in some way we don’t understand what we are doing. Hence the solipsism we are led to is a ‘conclusion’ one reaches and then *abandons*, because having reached ‘it’ one should see that there was a move earlier in the conjuring trick (PI 308) that we missed and which confused us. Our ‘conclusion’ is not a free-standing positive discovery; rather our arriving at that conclusion reveals to us that the project we are thinking through is wrong-headed.<sup>25</sup>

For example, when thinking about the notion that thought links language and world, we found ourselves realising that the Subject we had invoked was an agency with the capacity we sought to explain. To think that that

argument shows that our ‘capacity to think’ is something we cannot coherently question – that intelligibility as con-formity is an ‘internal property’ of a thought and the possession of such thoughts an ‘internal property’ of a Subject – is to misunderstand, and under-estimate, our embarrassment. It is to over-elaborate on the fact that *we* have tied ourselves in knots. The final step is to hear these interim ‘assertions’ as we hear the ‘assertion’ that the person who crosses the line first *always* wins, namely, as not assertions at all, as things that our being confused endowed with the air of being assertions.<sup>26</sup>

Thus, to take the arguments presented as revealing that we need a solipsistic metaphysics is to turn off the road too early. It is to attempt to ‘account for’ what we need to recognise as *perplexing* and *interim* conclusions, conclusions which only those who misunderstand them would try to account for. So to react – to our finding that we were having to take for granted ‘feats’ we were seeking to explain – by developing a speculative metaphysical theory that would explain how we *can* take those feats for granted is to misunderstand that finding: the solipsist jumps in with an answer to a question which only someone who has got the wrong end of the stick raises. Our taking those feats for granted is an embarrassment, something we do not need to ‘account for’; instead we must go in search of the earlier trick in the conjuring trick that led us up what we now recognise is a blind alley.

A proposal I offered in section 3 is that the earlier move in our cases is a glossing over of the sign/symbol distinction. Our succumbing to that confusion ‘allows’ us to ‘imagine’ a matter of fact about whether a proposition and a possible fact correspond, endowing with pseudo-content the philosophically interesting pseudo-question of whether a proposition ‘works’. As a sign, there is no reason to think that the hybrid sentence/proposition ‘corresponds’ or ‘fails to correspond’ to any aspect of reality. But as a symbol, there is an already-established way for the hybrid sentence/proposition to be used and hence a possible fact to which its use ought to conform. In the confusion of a sign/symbol hybrid, these two incompatible characteristics are combined and we generate a feat that will define for us the ‘meaningfulness’ of a proposition: the maintenance of a con-formity between the hybrid and a possible fact. The contingency of that relation is ‘provided’ by its ‘independent’ character as a *sign* – ‘it is arbitrary’ – and the relevance of its relation to only this particular possible fact by its ‘already-committed’ character as a *symbol* – its identification is in itself an identification of its use.

David Pears suggests that the following strategy informs the *Tractatus*:

The argument which [Wittgenstein] uses to establish [his metaphysics] starts from the existence of factual language. We evidently do succeed in using this language to describe the world, but how is it done? His answer is that we succeed only because there is a fixed grid of possible combinations of objects to which the structure of our language conforms. The grid must exist and connections must be

made with it if language is going to work. But it clearly does work and so the metaphysical conclusions follow.

(Pears 1987: 6)

According to the present section's therapeutic reading, Wittgenstein's intent is to point out that we have confused ourselves in thinking we have at our disposal an understanding of what it is for language to 'work'. It seems utterly innocent to say that since we use language, language 'is possible', or to infer from the fact that I am thinking that 'I can think', that I have 'the capacity to think'. But are the philosophically interesting 'feats' that we (hope we) have in mind really clear to us? My hangover may lead me to say 'I just can't think today' or the noise of machinery may lead me to say 'Talking is impossible here'. But I would suggest that it is Wittgenstein's aim to demonstrate that 'the possibility of thought' and 'the possibility of language' that the conception of intelligibility as con-formity articulates are 'feats' that 'manifest themselves' before us only when we become confused. I may describe one string of signs as meaningful and another as meaningless but is the 'achievement' of the former more philosophically interesting than their having been given a use in a language while the latter have not? My suggestion is that we have failed to assign to 'language' or 'thought' a sense by reference to which we can pose the question of intelligibility as con-formity.<sup>27</sup>

## 10 A therapeutic response to scepticism

But where would this therapeutic reading leave the sceptic? There is something in the tone of Wittgenstein's response to solipsism and scepticism that suggests that, while solipsism is confused, scepticism is doubly so: there is an 'extent' to which solipsism is a truth, but scepticism is 'palpably nonsense'. My suggestion is that Wittgenstein's reaction to scepticism needs to be seen in relation to the project to which solipsism is a response: whereas solipsism offers an interpretation of what the intelligibility of the world consists in, scepticism represents an unsustainable agnosticism about the intelligibility of the world.<sup>28</sup> Such a view is a confused halfway house. The sceptic does not himself raise that question of intelligibility but he operates with a conception of the Subject that does and that imposes on the sceptic an unacknowledged commitment about how 'the outside world' is, in that he presupposes that it is fit for the thoughts of that Subject, its doubts included. This commitment is unacknowledged to the extent that he believes that the existence of the Subject makes no claim on the character of the world it thinks about; in particular, there might not be any such world and the Subject would still be left behind, deluded but intact.

Now, ultimately, the deeper question of intelligibility is confused too, as is the notion of this 'claim' that the very existence of Subjectivity makes on the character of the world. But that is no comfort to the sceptic who operates

with a metaphysics regarding which that is a pressing question. He too needs to think of thoughts as sign/symbol hybrids: as a symbol, such a thought has a ‘direction’ but, as a sign, it is ‘independent’ of its subject matter. This independence allows the sceptic’s epistemological anxiety to emerge that our inner life, being as it is, is consistent with the outside world taking any number of wildly different forms, including even its utter non-existence; the deeper metaphysical question that this independence raises is whether the contents of these inner lives even constitute stances on – embody intelligible claims about – any such ‘outside’.<sup>29</sup>

From this perspective, what *we* need if we are to appreciate what is wrong with scepticism is not a superior metaphysics of thought, a better account of the intentionality of subjectivity. Rather, what we need to recognise is that the *sceptic* needs some such account to satisfy a confused need with which *he* is burdened. The sceptic is doubly confused in that he fails to see that his metaphysics forces upon him a particular question, a question which is ultimately confused. That latter qualification is not, however, something in which *he* can take comfort because his metaphysical commitments raise the question all the same.<sup>30</sup>

The issue of whether scepticism calls for an advance in theory is complex, with at least three aspects to it. First, the sceptic himself needs a theory of thought that will endow his doubts with ‘direction’: he cannot account for the content of his doubts, rendering them ‘verbal doubts’, and, in this sense, he has run into the ‘hardness of the soft’. But, second, he is here responding to a demand which his own *confused* metaphysics forces upon him: in this sense, the theory that he needs – the theory without which ‘we could not philosophize’ as the sceptic does – must ultimately disappear too. (We must be wary of an inference (of a now familiar form) from his asking his questions to the need to explain how such questions ‘are possible’.) Third, then, since there is no coherent challenge which, if met, would restore sense to the sceptic’s doubts, we need no epistemological theory to answer these merely ‘verbal doubts’.<sup>31</sup>

## 11 Concluding remarks

Does this therapeutic response to scepticism work? Might the sceptic find his missing account of the intelligibility of his doubts? He certainly won’t if the argument of sections 9 and 10 is correct. But in any case, we need to recognise that we have here no more than a template for how we might respond to the particular thought experiments – invoking dreams, evil demons, brains in vats, etc. – which are typically cited as providing reasons for scepticism. Since the claim is that the sceptic’s doubts lack ‘direction’, this would need to be demonstrated in each case. That, I would suggest, is one way of understanding the relevance to scepticism of the later Wittgenstein’s philosophical views.

An obvious theme in *On Certainty* are ‘claims’ whose reliability as knowledge claims we, in sceptical mood, worry over, when, were they to turn out ‘legitimate’, their very meaning, rather than their truth, would be in question; their direction, rather than their accuracy about what is found ‘there’, would be unclear.<sup>32</sup> Tracing continuities between the therapeutic critique of scepticism and Wittgenstein’s reflections on private language is a more complicated business but I will end with a sketch of one of several possible paths that one might trace. Those reflections challenge the notion that our sensations are inner objects of knowledge, in contrast with which ‘outer objects’ may appear unknowable. Wittgenstein challenges the notion that I know my own sensations (PI 246) on the grounds that we have assigned no real sense to what it would be for someone to be ignorant of them. The confused vision we surreptitiously draw on here is of a person who would not even be imprisoned within a circle of seemings, of appearances, as he is supposed to have lost contact with those too, with ‘how things look to him’, ‘how it feels to him’. But such a creature is not merely ignorant; it is no longer a Subject, no longer a creature about which it makes sense to ask ‘How is it *for* (or *with*) them?’ It is a creature without ‘direction’.<sup>33,34</sup>

### Notes

- 1 The NB 44 entry – dated 1 May 1915 – mentions Russell 1914a; but the evidence above supports the notion that it is the Lowell lectures that Wittgenstein has in mind. Wittgenstein had asked Keynes in January of that year (CL 98) to send him a copy of the book in which they were published (Russell 1914b).
- 2 Might the broader ‘domain’ to which I have referred include the contents of one’s own mind? On a certain construal of the latter, as (so to speak) ‘objects of thought internal to the thinker’, then yes, in that what I will call the ‘question of intelligibility’ could be raised about them also (see section 11). But we would then have two quite different senses of what it is for something ‘to be external to the thinker’ in play.
- 3 For related reasons, I will not examine here phenomenalist readings of the book that would, I appreciate, give a familiar and very straightforward reading of Wittgenstein’s opposition to scepticism.
- 4 I leave aside two further important questions. First, how have these forms of realism and idealism manifested themselves in the thinking of particular philosophers? Second, how do these forms of realism and idealism relate to the diverse other views to which philosophy has given those same labels? On the latter topic, the relationship is complicated, for example, between what I have called ‘idealism’ (a set of views about how the world can be thought about, correctly *or* incorrectly) and ‘idealist’ views about how the world can be known which are meant to provide direct responses to scepticism.
- 5 The early parts of the *Tractatus* concern reality’s relation to language rather than thought. But section 4 argues that Wittgenstein saw thought and language as in the same boat with respect to the confusions to be identified.
- 6 I ignore here issues that arise out of the particular details of Wittgenstein’s ontology of ‘objects’ and his notions of ‘names’ and ‘elementary propositions’.
- 7 That we might usefully identify here a target of the early Wittgenstein does not require that any commentator ever ascribed the view in question to him. But

Malcolm (1986: 14) and Pears (1987: 8) come close; Hacker's seemingly related interpretation is discussed in section 4 below.

- 8 The picture I will present is broadly in the spirit of what has become known as the 'resolute reading' of the *Tractatus* (championed by Diamond (see, for example, 1991 Chs. 1–6, 2000a and 2000b) and Conant (see, for example, 1991, 1993, 2000 and 2002), with some possible anticipations in Winch (1987) and Goldfarb ('Names, Objects and Realism in the *Tractatus*', unpublished manuscript), as well as in the teaching of Burton Breben). That reading has been criticised, with justification, for constituting a very abstract, 'strategic' account of how the book ought to work as opposed to a detailed reading of the text as we find it; in other words, that the reading only exists in spirit! (Sullivan sums up his reaction to the core ideas of this reading as 'Well, yes, so far. And now . . .?' (2002: 44).) Though I have some reservations about the 'resolute' approach, the present chapter could be read as showing how a resolute reading might be given substance. (Other recent such efforts which specifically address solipsism are Floyd (1998), Friedlander (2001) and Kremer (forthcoming).)
- 9 Regarding the uses of scare-quotes here, see section 9.
- 10 What we miss here is a reason (i) for comparing our use of a particular proposition with the form of a particular possible fact which (ii) functions independently of the way in which this proposition is used. If a mental act of some sort assigned in some way a proposition to a possible fact, then our failing to talk intelligibly with that proposition would then be a matter of an inconsistency between the way in which that proposition is used and the form of the particular possible fact to which the relevant mental act assigns that proposition. The next section criticises a related view but we can at least see why it is a natural partner for a realism that sees the form of language as answerable to – as needing to be brought into con-formity with – that of reality.
- 11 See note 9.
- 12 This translation of the second sentence combines elements from the Ogden translation (which seems more idiomatic) and the Pears and McGuinness translation (which picks up the qualification, 'aber').
- 13 The plausibility of the objection that opens the preceding section turns on 'words' being construed as referring to signs, rather than symbols, second-language rather than first-language expressions.
- 14 Hacker has proposed that it was only after writing the *Tractatus* that Wittgenstein came to realise that ostensive definitions do not 'exit from language' (see 1986: 75–8, 1999: 125 and Baker and Hacker 2001). My suggestion is, first, that that realisation follows directly from the quite general remarks 3.263 and 4.026 and, second, that the plausibility of this connection is demonstrated by the natural interpretation it gives to Wittgenstein's description of language and world as 'internally-related'. Most of the evidence that Hacker does provide comes in the form of later criticisms of the notion that ostensive definitions 'exit from language' (e.g. PR 54, quoted above), with the insinuation that these ought to be read as criticising the *Tractatus*. The only item of evidence that he provides for that insinuation is the following comment contained in Waismann's record of conversations with Wittgenstein: 'In the *Tractatus* logical analysis and ostensive definition were unclear to me. At that time I thought there was "a connexion between language and reality." (VC 209–10). It is unfortunate that there is no record of Wittgenstein's explanation of what he meant by this, if he indeed provided one. A possible alternative reading to Hacker's starts from the fact that the remarks that immediately follow discuss 'hypotheses'. In the roughly contemporary PR, Wittgenstein asserts that hypotheses have 'a different formal relation to reality from that of verification' (PR 285). If so, they and ostensive definitions

would each provide grounds for doubting whether all legitimate proposition-like structures exemplify ‘a connexion between language and reality’, the emphasis of doubt falling now on ‘a’.

15 See Goldfarb (‘Names, Objects and Realism in the *Tractatus*’, unpublished manuscript) and Winch 1987. Among the complexities I ignore here is the difference between claiming that a language of thought ‘animates’ language and claiming that the thinker ‘animates’ the language of thought. Another relevant discussion, TLP 5.541–5.5421, which I do not examine, concerns how and why an ‘externally-related’ Subject also cannot be understood as that which binds together ‘constituents of thought’, as Russell at some points proposes (see his 1913).

16 TLP 4.1121 declares that epistemology ‘is the philosophy of psychology’. In its formulation in the ‘Notes on Logic’, this remark is preceded by the proposal that ‘[p]hilosophy consists of logic and metaphysics: logic is its basis’ (NB 106). Both readings I sketch here suggest that our present understanding of epistemological questions rests upon a confused metaphysics of subjectivity. The metaphysical reading above infers that we need a superior metaphysics. The therapeutic reading to come rejects that inference.

17 That I have reservations about such a reading is probably obvious: not least, let us not forget that it is *solipsism* that we are contemplating ascribing to Wittgenstein, a view which, *prima facie*, is crazy whether sayable or unsayable!

18 I pass over here the complicated story of how disagreement over internal relations figured in the break that Moore and Russell attempted to make with their idealist predecessors (for discussion, see Baldwin 1990 Ch. 1 and Hylton 1990 *passim*), though what follows might be seen as a reinterpretation of Bradley’s formulation, ‘internal relations . . . point towards a higher consummation beyond themselves’ (1914: 239–40).

19 Compare TLP 5.5303 and 6.2322–6.2323.

20 Compare Searle 1992: 62: ‘If you are told that a scientific study has shown that touchdowns actually only count 5.99999999 points, you know that somebody is seriously confused’.

21 Clearly, we face problems when we try to articulate *what* it is that such a person learns (for a recent discussion of some of these, see Moore 2003 and Sullivan 2003); my approach here has been to present analogies for, and examples of, how such pseudo-issues might appear and disappear.

22 Clearly, one might want to argue that ‘crossing the line first and winning are internally related’ is an assertion after all, about how this game is played or what its rules are, say. In which case, one might say that we are contrasting one *kind* of assertion (or issue) with another. I favour the formulations in the text because they capture in general terms the crucial element of *misunderstanding* in these cases, the sense that the person who comes to understand sees that they had succumbed to a confusion not a mere error. And, of course, these formulations have the interpretative virtue of echoing plausibly formulations of Wittgenstein’s, TLP 6.54 in particular.

23 An issue I cannot explore here is why the best way to approach the confused person is by ‘asserting’ that such internal relations hold. The answer, I would argue, lies in TLP 6.53 and the fact that such an ‘assertion’ seems to address *his* issue.

24 I will not worry here over just how similar the view described is to the view in the *Tractatus* that one might describe in the same terms: for instance, my discussion uses ‘macro-objects’ in its illustrations rather than objects that would count as Tractarian ‘objects’, the referents of the ultimate elements of analysis.

25 There is a certain analogy perhaps with proof by *reductio ad absurdum*. The conclusion we ought to draw when we understand the proof is not necessarily the conclusion which we find as the final line in the argument. Instead what we ought to take away is suspicion about what led us to that final line – in the *reductio* case, the arguments' premises.

26 Section 5 suggested that the declaration, 'the limits of my language mean the limits of my world', is a natural way to express the predicament we may find ourselves in when we attempt to explain how we come to learn symbols. But this declaration, this 'conclusion', serves, I suggest, not so much to question whether we 'learn symbols' – in one sense, we obviously do – but to question our understanding of that achievement. The con-formist confusion provides not only an image of what it is for a proposition to 'make sense' – con-formity of proposition and possible fact – but also an image of what coming to master a proposition is – a process of grasping that con-formity. My therapeutic reading makes clear that we need to dispense with both images. Whether anything more constructive emerges from the *Tractatus* about the learning of symbols is a question which must await another occasion. But I will mention that if the therapeutic reading is right, we need to be cautious about taking mastery of symbols as a form of 'know-how', a matter of 'practice' or a mode of 'seeing'. That reading suggests we may not have assigned a clear sense to the notions of 'knowing-that', of 'the theoretical' and of 'saying', with which these alternatives are taken to contrast. If so, they will be confused too.

27 I want to mention briefly here the view set out by Peter Sullivan in a short but dense discussion in Sullivan 1996. He too organises his reading of the *Tractatus* around the question of whether we can acquire 'an assurance of the harmony through which thinking genuinely engages with the world' (1996: 203). He argues that '[t]he insight that leads the solipsist to give voice is that the notions of world and thought are . . . intrinsically tied, that the world is not something *other*, so that it would need the kind of positive philosophy aimed at establishing an *a priori* order to ensure thought's engagement with it' (ibid.: 204). He proposes that the 'worry that reality might outrun language is silenced only by conceiving of language directly as that which embraces reality' (ibid.: 209). Sullivan's reading is subtle and complex but a misgiving that my discussion suggests is over whether there are clear senses behind its terms, 'harmony', 'engagement', 'outrunning' and 'embracing'. My worry, as with Pears' seemingly innocent talk of 'language working', is that there is not. Now if that were to be Sullivan's point, his view would be closer to a therapeutic view of the kind I have presented here, though that is not an outcome that, I take it, he would welcome. (Sullivan 2002 sets out some of his views on 'resolute' readings.) But, in any case, it seems to me that he is driven to make claims – about 'the *transparency* or intrinsic truth-directedness of the proposition' (1996: 197), about language's 'transparency or intrinsic sense' (ibid.: 212) and about 'the very notions of what it is for there to be a world . . . and of what it is to think [being] intrinsically tied' (ibid.: 203) – that evoke instead the midpoint of the dialectic of the argument set out in section 3. That argument attempted to show that our need to take the 'meaningfulness' of propositions for granted when we consider the 'harmony' between them and the world drives us to 'assertions' of which 'propositions possess sense intrinsically' might be another excellent example. But crucially, the argument is that we come to these 'assertions' only as problematic, 'transitional' formulations which represent not stable views on philosophical issues but indications of confusion in our thinking. But I am not confident that I understand the position that Sullivan sets out, so I will not press this possible criticism further here.

28 Diamond 2000a takes quite a different tack from my own in arguing that the *Tractatus* contains a response to scepticism about other minds. Where these two approaches converge, I think, is in questioning an image presupposed by the sceptic and those who would answer him in his own terms: that of knowing or failing to know a realm which we are also committed to viewing as unintelligible (as Diamond seems to stress) or about the intelligibility of which we are agnostic (as I stress). A reservation that I have about Diamond's approach is the rather 'thick' sense of scepticism with which her paper operates (at least initially) which foregrounds a notion of 'privacy' that doesn't seem to figure in the early Wittgenstein's thinking (see section 1).

29 McDowell presents a similar thought in his 1998b Ch. 11. See also Putnam 1981 on 'the problem of how *pure* mental states of intending, believing, etc., can . . . constitute or cause reference' (p. 43).

30 'Resolute' readers may feel uncomfortable with my talk here of confused questions being raised by (equally confused) metaphysical commitments: if these are really pseudo-questions and pseudo-commitments, in what sense can such items of nonsense stand in logical relations, such as implication? I think there is a perfectly good sense in which we can talk of some items of nonsense standing in such relations. Even if one accepts that a nonsensical claim does not 'say anything', it may seem to in a quite determinate way which one may come to understand; to do so we must understand how it 'borrows' its apparent sense from propositions with sense. Part of what that borrowing is is the pseudo-proposition standing in pseudo-logical relations with other nonsensical 'propositions' that borrow their sense from corresponding sources. As a result, one can offer reasons why certain nonsensical claims should naturally 'follow' from others: for example, there is an obvious sense in which the White King in 'Alice through the Looking Glass' is *right* when he argues that it can't be true that 'Nobody walks much faster than [the Messenger]' because if 'he' – 'Nobody' – did, 'he'd have been here first' (Carroll 1872: 166–7). It follows in that it would follow if 'Nobody' figured in these propositions as a name. There is much more to be said here but that must await another occasion.

31 Two proposals in the early pages of the *Tractatus* that suggest an anti-sceptical argument of their own might be integrated, I think, with either of the readings presented above: (i) Given that '[t]he world is all that is the case' (TLP 1), to think that the world might not exist would be to think that it might be the case that nothing is the case – is thus-and-so – the non-existence of the world included! (See LE 41–2.) (ii) Given that '[o]bjects form the substance of the world' (TLP 2.021), what would it mean to deny the existence of objects? 'If the world had no substance . . . [i]t would then be impossible to form a picture of the world (true or false)' (TLP 2.021, 2.0212). (i) meets (ii) here in the idea of denying the conditions that must be met for language to 'work': if '[t]he general form of the proposition is: Such and such is the case' (TLP 4.5), then there is nothing to say when there is no such thing as things being the case (i.e. when the world does not 'exist'). The metaphysical reading above takes the absurdity of such an idea as revealing something about the relationship between the Subject and its World. The therapeutic reading above takes the absurdity of such an idea as stemming from a confused notion of language 'working' and sees both the denial and the affirmation of the existence of 'the World' or of 'its substance' as confused.

32 See, for example, OC 80–1.

33 Part of the scaffolding that was used in constructing the view of Wittgenstein presented here has since been removed, principally because it would have made the chapter too long. The scaffolding in question is a comparison with

the early Heidegger's responses to scepticism. (No doubt for some my readiness to hyphenate 'con-formity' will have been a clue.) There too one finds an appreciation of idealism for its recognition of an analogue of the question of concept acquisition (Heidegger 1962: 251), an attack on the idea of intelligibility as con-formity which finds expression in the assertion that the thinker and its world are 'internally related' (the thinker's 'primary kind of Being is such that it is always "outside" alongside entities which it encounters and which belong to a world already discovered' (*ibid.*: 89)) and a criticism of sceptical questions as resting 'on the basis of a constant misunderstanding of the mode of being of the one who raises the question' (Heidegger 1985: 215). (Regarding section 2 of the present chapter, particularly useful for me were Heidegger 1982, 1990 and 1997.)

34 I would like to thank Maria Alvarez, Dawn Phillips, Aaron Ridley and Graham Stevens for comments on earlier versions of this chapter.

# WITTGENSTEIN AND THE QUESTION OF LINGUISTIC IDEALISM

*Ilham Dilman*

## 1 What is linguistic idealism?

Bernard Williams described Wittgenstein as a ‘linguistic idealist’. Kripke called him a sceptic and Russell said that Wittgenstein had given language an untrammelled freedom which it had not enjoyed hitherto. These claims are connected in that they are all directed to something that Wittgenstein denied. The denial in question is that of a reality external to and independent of language on which our use of words is supposed to be based. It is very easy to find this denial objectionable: ‘Surely there must be a reality that is independent of our language and its concepts must correspond to features of such a reality! A denial of this would leave our language hanging in mid-air and turn its logic into something arbitrary! Are we to say that before there were human beings and human language there was nothing – no mountains, no rocks, no water and no rivers? Are we seriously to suggest that the realities with which we engage are a product of our language in the way that, on Berkeley’s view, physical reality is a product of our minds, namely ideas – when the ideas in different minds agree in certain ways?’

The objection to Berkeley is that he shares an assumption common to the Sceptic and the Realist, namely that whenever we perceive physical objects we have or are presented with ideas. This means that if we have any knowledge of physical objects this knowledge must be *indirect*. The sceptic appreciates this and so denies that we can have any such knowledge. To reject this conclusion, Berkeley has to deny that our knowledge of physical objects is indirect. Given the above assumption, however, Berkeley can only do so by reducing physical objects, from the ideas of which alone he assumes we can know them, to these ideas themselves: ‘matter is nothing but ideas’. It is this reduction that is objectionable; it is the crux of his idealism. The assumption which forces him to do so in his determination to oppose scepticism is the original property of philosophical realism. The realist rightly wants to preserve the independent and continuous existence of physical objects in the face of interrupted perceptions of them and so feels forced to claim that

our perceptions and knowledge of them must be indirect. Obviously it is the original assumption common to the three philosophical positions – realism, scepticism and idealism – that needs to be rejected. How Wittgenstein does so falls outside the topic of this chapter.

If the *linguistic* idealism that has been attributed to Wittgenstein is conceived of as parallel to Berkeley's idealism then it must be the claim that reality is the product of human language. Wittgenstein never makes such a claim, but it is easy to thus summarise what one gathers from various remarks he makes in discussing language, logic and mathematics. All the same, it is a caricature of what he says. I shall try to correct this caricature.

'There is no reality outside the mind and apart from ideas.' This is Berkeleyan idealism. 'There is no reality outside language and apart from its grammar – or logical concepts.' This is linguistic idealism. Their antitheses are Lockean realism and linguistic realism. Indeed, these two forms of idealism are reactions to the two respective forms of realism. Lockean realism thinks of 'matter' as a substance, an 'unknown somewhat' that supports its various qualities, sensible and causal, or in which these 'inhere'. Likewise linguistic realism claims that there must be simple objects, bare particulars, devoid of any property, which combined in various ways constitute what we state, describe and speak about in the language we use. These objects constitute 'the substance of the world'. This is *one* form of linguistic realism.

I am *not* suggesting that this is Wittgenstein's conception of the relation between language and reality in the *Tractatus*. But it bears a certain resemblance to it and some philosophers have read what Wittgenstein says in the *Tractatus* in this way. On this realist view the simple objects exist independently of language; but on the *Tractatus* view this is not so. They are 'instruments of language'; they are the meanings of names. They are not what we talk about or refer to in our use of language; they are what makes reference and the statement of facts possible. Nevertheless, there is an element of realism – linguistic realism – in the *Tractatus* which may be characterised as 'Platonic'. For it measures natural languages against language with a capital L which exists independently of these languages and the surroundings of human life in which they are used. The 'objects' of the *Tractatus* thus, while they are internal to language with a capital L, nevertheless exist independently of our actual ways of speaking. Our actual language, our actual use of words, is thus thought to be subservient to something that exists outside of time and space. It is in this sense that we have a form of linguistic realism in the *Tractatus* that Wittgenstein dismantled bit by little bit in his later writings. This applies equally to his conception of mathematics in the *Tractatus*.

Thus, while in the *Tractatus* logic does not need and does not have any metaphysical foundations in an independent reality – 'logic must look after itself' – it is *itself* a metaphysical foundation of natural languages. Actual languages must conform to it; they are the tail which logic with a capital L, as the top dog, wags. In the *Investigations*, this relation is reversed and

the capital L is dropped from both logic and language. We have 'language-games' which involve our behaviour; they are organically related in natural languages which are themselves part of human life. They form an important part of the life and culture in which speakers of a language participate. Logic appears in that. It does not have an independent anchor outside or separate from our natural languages and the language-games that form part of such languages. Those in turn are subject to historical change. Thus, logic, though its principles, like the propositions of mathematics, are timelessly true, is not itself rooted in anything timeless.

## 2 Realism and nominalism as forms of linguistic realism and idealism

I want to give another example of a form of linguistic realism rejected by nominalism which constitutes a form of linguistic idealism. The philosophical question to which they respond concerns the *generality* inherent in the meanings of our words, which finds expression in our using the same word on different occasions, in our applying one and the same word to different instances of the same thing. 'Surely,' one is inclined to think, 'there must be some consistency in the use of a word, some rhyme or reason for its application to the instances to which it is applied. One does not use the word any old how. There must be something about these instances, something that is true of them all, which makes the word applicable to them. There must be something to which its use is responsible, something independent of this use to which speakers of the language conform so that there is interpersonal agreement in their use of the word.'

This is a form of linguistic realism. It claims that what gives meaning to a word and the generality that belongs to it is *ultimately* something that exists independently of language – the properties that are common to different things in reality, or the similarities which as a matter of fact we find in them. There is thus on the realist view a correspondence between words and things reminiscent of the correspondence between a lid and the many boxes which it fits.

Thus, in his book *Thinking and Experience*, H.H. Price says that 'we cannot help noticing that there is a great deal of recurrence or repetition in the world around us' and that 'this perceptual repetition . . . makes conceptual cognition possible'. He goes on: 'In a world of incessant novelty . . . no concepts could ever be acquired, and thinking could never begin' (Price 1953: 7–8). What, however, he fails to recognise is that the repetition of the same in question is something that we notice as people who already have a mastery of language, of a particular language, and living in a world that is lived with language. Consequently, Price's attempt to base the generality inherent in the meanings of our words on something that exists independently of language fails. He is like someone attempting to lift himself up by his boot-

straps. Hume recognised this clearly in his attempt to justify induction when he discovered a vicious circle which such an attempt cannot avoid.

Traditionally, this problem of ‘the one and the many’ is put in terms of general nouns or common names and what the things they name name: what is it they have in common by virtue of which we use the same word to name them? The nominalist answers that they have nothing in common except that they are *called* by the same name. This is a rejection of the answer of the linguistic realist. However, while it escapes the vicious circle of realism, it makes the use of words and language into a wholly arbitrary matter. Superficially and taken in isolation, there are various remarks in Wittgenstein’s writings that are reminiscent of this answer and so various philosophers thought that he was a nominalist.

Rightly wanting to deny that Wittgenstein is a nominalist, Renford Bambrough (Bambrough 1960–1961) turns him into a realist: it is not for nothing that we call the many things we call ‘games’ games. They are related to each other by ‘a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing: sometimes overall similarities, sometimes similarities of detail’ (PI 66). But Wittgenstein is concerned to reject his own early idea of a general form of proposition here and is using the example of games – that we call many different things games – as an analogy. ‘*Look and see*,’ he says, ‘whether there is anything common to all. – For if you look at them you will not see something that is common to *all*, but similarities, relationships, and a whole series of them at that.’ *We are looking and seeing these things as language-users*. This is being contrasted with what we are inclined to say *when we think as a philosopher* and are in the grip of a picture which suggests to us what *must* be the case: the idea of a common essence.

We think that the meaning of a general noun which applies to many different instances of the thing it names is to be found in the common essence in all of them – much in the way that alcohol is to be found in all alcoholic drinks, like beer and wine, gin and whisky (BB 17). And with this idea in mind what actually guides us in applying this general noun goes out of focus. For it is in the actual surroundings in which we use it in a particular case that its meaning stands out clearly. We look past these, however, when we search for the common essence of things to which the word applies – the things that are instances of what the word names. As Wittgenstein puts it: ‘in order to find the real artichoke, we divest it of its leaves’ (PI 164). But it is the leaves that constitute the artichoke, each particular artichoke, and without them there is no artichoke at all. Indeed, ‘the real artichoke’ is a fiction.

It is the same with the thing named and with the meaning of the general noun which names it. Thus – to take one of Wittgenstein’s examples – one cannot understand what a smile is by concentrating on instances of the human mouth when it is smiling, trying to discern a common geometrical pattern there. For ‘a smiling mouth *smiles* only in a human face’ (PI 583). ‘Smiling’, Wittgenstein said, ‘is our name for an expression in a normal play

of expressions' (Z 527). One has to consider the circumstances in which one responds to a smile. I would not be able to respond to a face fixed in a permanent smile. Indeed that would hardly be a smile. By contrast, someone may be looking for something he has dropped. I see it, pick it up and give it to him. He smiles as he says thank you. I smile back. It is in such circumstances that we speak of a smile. Remove them or alter them radically, freeze the smile so that it no longer varies with the circumstances, and you no longer have a smile. Without these varying circumstances, there is no smile, yet we have no way of summing them up by any formula or description.

Similarities too, as I said, strike us as *language users* and in *particular circumstances*, as do outstanding features which Wittgenstein illustrates beautifully in his discussion of what makes a friendly face friendly (BB 145–6). When we are in doubt, *these* are what we consider so as to be clear that a general noun which we are inclined to use in a particular case does apply. These are the considerations we refer to in justifying its application. The philosopher, however, here as in other cases – for instance as in the case where, like Hume, he seeks for the justification of induction itself, the *ultimate* justification of any inductive conclusion – wants to know the considerations that govern the application of *any* general term. He thinks that if these vary from case to case, there must be behind them, something general that is the same in all cases in which we apply a general term supporting them – the core of the artichoke. He thinks that the considerations to which we resort in any particular case constitute a justification *only because of what lies behind them all* – namely what we take for granted in our use of general terms. He thinks that what we normally call a justification in a particular case is not a justification unless what we thus take for granted is *itself justified*: the *ultimate* justification for the application of a general term.<sup>1</sup>

The philosophical theses of realism and nominalism are responses to *this* quest for an *ultimate* justification. They are answers to the question ‘what is the *ultimate* justification for the application of the general term?’ *taken at face value*. They raise the insuperable objections that I have pointed out – the vicious circle in the case of realism and the appearance of an arbitrariness in our use of general terms, and that means of all terms, in the case of nominalism. Wittgenstein did not take that question at face value; he rejected realism and he answered the charge of arbitrariness. In his answering of that charge, he rejected nominalism, and so the kind of idealism which it constitutes.

Renford Bambrough appreciates that Wittgenstein is not a nominalist; but unclear about the way Wittgenstein avoids leaving our use of language hanging in midair, he turns Wittgenstein into a realist here. It is his own realism that gets in the way of an appreciation of the subtleties of Wittgenstein's contribution here. Basing himself on what Wittgenstein says about ‘games and family resemblances’, he claims that *in the end* all classification rests on the similarities and differences with which nature presents us *independently*

of our systems of classification. He calls them ‘objective similarities and differences’ (Bambrough 1960–1961: 221). *Ultimately*, he says, ‘there are only similarities and differences from which we may choose according to our purposes and interests’ (*ibid.*: 222).

There can, however, only be similarities and differences between things that we identify as this or that kind of thing. In other words, where there are similarities there are already classifications. That is, similarities and differences cannot come logically before classes and, therefore, they cannot provide an ultimate basis for all classification – for the existence of kinds and our naming of them. The claim thus can be seen to involve a vicious circle, like the one discovered by Hume in his quest to find an ultimate justification of all inductive conclusions. Wittgenstein makes this point in connection with ostensive definition which Augustine sees as the basis from which language develops. He points out that giving an ostensive definition presupposes the existence of a language and that to understand it one must have already come a long way. As he puts it: ‘the ostensive definition explains the use – the meaning – of the word when the overall role of the word in language is clear’ (PI 30).

As I put it elsewhere (Dilman 1981: 182–3), classification necessarily presupposes objects, situations, actions, etc. that we can refer to, name and characterise prior to and, therefore, independently of the classification. The similarities and differences that it draws on go with that; they belong with our name for or characterisation of what we classify. We do not, as it were, classify bare particulars; we do not start in a grammatical vacuum. And where we have objects to classify, we have already names for them, and so a whole range of similarities and differences from which we can select in classifying them in different ways. That is, we must already have come a long way before we can classify things; we must already have things to classify. If we are to explain what we mean by, say, ‘elm tree’, we shall point to similarities and differences between *trees* we call by that name and others we call by other names. But then we would have to go on to explain what makes a *plant* a tree as opposed to, say, a shrub, and so on. And what we shall come down to *in the end* will not be, as it were, bare particulars which we call by the same name because of the way they resemble each other, but the *grammar* in which we carry out the comparisons in question. So what we come down to *in the end* are not, and indeed cannot be, similarities and differences exhibited by nature.

It is just at this point that Wittgenstein raised the question whether grammar, in this case the grammar within which we make comparisons, is arbitrary, whether it is not responsible to anything. It is at this point that he asks whether nature has nothing to say about what we call ‘the same’, ‘similar’ and ‘different’ in various connections of our lives (Z 364). He does not deny that she has something to say; only, he says, she speaks in another way than Bambrough imagines. In *Zettel*, Wittgenstein asks: ‘If I say “there is a particular similarity among the primary colours” – whence do I derive

the idea of this similarity?’ (Z 331). He responds: ‘Just as the idea ‘primary colour’ is nothing else but ‘blue or red or green or yellow’ – is not the idea of that similarity too given simply by the four colours?’ Here, we can imagine Bambrough protesting: ‘Is then our concept of primary colours arbitrary – like my concept of alphas as opposed to the South Sea Islander’s classification of trees?’ ‘Then might one also take red, green and circular together?’’. Wittgenstein’s response is: ‘Why not?’

What Wittgenstein says about ‘similarity’ (BB 133) and ‘simplicity’, namely that it makes no sense to speak *absolutely* of the simple parts of anything, that is ‘*outside* a particular language-game’ (PI 47) applies equally to ‘arbitrariness’ and also to ‘reality’. Grouping red, green and circular together makes an *arbitrary* collection *for us* – that is *within our language and culture*. Wittgenstein asks: what have red and green on the one hand and yellow and blue on the other in common? (BB 134). *We* would say, ‘Nothing’. Wittgenstein then imagines ‘a use of language (a culture)’ in which there is a common name for the first two colours and another one for the other two. In the way he sets up this example, he makes it easy for us to see that, for the people he imagines, there would be nothing arbitrary about the classification on which these common names are based.

Wittgenstein gives a great many examples. I shall mention only one other of them. When we hear the diatonic scale, we are inclined to say that after every seven the same note recurs, and, asked why we call it the same note again one might well answer ‘Well, it’s a C again’ (BB 140–1). But Wittgenstein points out that this is not the answer we want. For we want to know what makes it a C again. The truth is that *we* agree in what we hear when we listen to the diatonic scale and we have been taught to use the word ‘the same’ of notes at intervals of an octave on the diatonic scale. Wittgenstein imagines someone who heard the same note after every four or three notes on the scale or – to put it differently – to describe what *he* hears as ‘hearing the same note again’. The important point here is that we could all have heard the notes on the diatonic scale the way he does and then we would have said that every third or fourth note is the same note. This is the same point as the one Wittgenstein argues in the *Investigations* with his example of the arithmetical series ‘*n* + 2’ (PI 143 and §185).

We may speak of Wittgenstein’s pupil in §185 as stupid. We speak of people who do not hear the differences we hear between notes as ‘tone-deaf’ – *i.e.* deaf to the aspects of the sounds that *we* hear as tones of music. But the *reality* of this aspect depends on this reaction being shared and on much else in our life that surrounds the activity of music making and listening to it. Thus, if we can describe a person like Wittgenstein’s pupil as ‘stupid’ or in the other case as ‘deaf to music’, thus implying the existence or reality of something to which he is blind or deaf, that is only because of the overwhelming agreement of reactions from which he is separated.

So if we had a society where the reactions of those we call ‘tone-deaf’

or ‘stupid’ or ‘feeble-minded’ were the prominent ones, i.e. those that are shared, then those aspects that are important to us in our life would not exist within that society. They would not be part of the reality of those belonging to that society. As Wittgenstein puts it: ‘One imagines the feeble-minded under the aspect of the degenerate, the essentially incomplete. . . . And so under that of disorder instead of a more primitive order (which would be a far more fruitful way of looking at them)’ (Z 372).

Nominalism, I said, is a form of linguistic idealism, for in rejecting realism it leaves the use of language hanging in midair. It claims that the generality that the meanings of words have depends on language without being able to relate the use of language to anything at all. Wittgenstein, we have seen, does reject realism without embracing any such idealism. To put it more generally, yes, for Wittgenstein ‘reality’ is a relative term, it is internally related to language, internal to the grammar of particular modes of discourse which form part of a natural language. But a natural language is rooted in the life of the people who speak it. Indeed we are the kind of creatures we are in the life we live with language; and all three – our language, our life and we are in constant interaction with each other. They are seemlessly related. Essences, which Wittgenstein says are expressed by grammar (PI 371), are a product of this interaction in the course of human history.

### 3 Wittgenstein and Kant on the limits of empiricism

Normally we would say that physics and astronomy are empirical disciplines whereas, by contrast, mathematics and formal logic are not; they are *a priori*, formal or reflective disciplines. What this means in the case of physics is that, however we develop theories in it, the results that we obtain by means of experiments, thought out and devised in the light of these theories, play a crucial role in our consideration of the acceptability of these theories. More simply, it means that physics ultimately deals with observable phenomena and is based in the end on our observations of these phenomena – however we make such observations.

In philosophy, *empiricism* starts innocently with a concern regarding the bases of the statements we make in what we observe – in our ‘experience’ as it is often put – and moves onto the question of what these statements must mean if they are to be based on ‘experience’. That is, there is a move here from truth to meaning. We are familiar with the way that Locke and Hume tried to derive the meanings of the terms of our language from ‘experience’, including those of what they called ‘general terms’, to analyse these into ‘ideas’. Later empiricists tried to do the same with the sense of statements, or ‘propositions’ as they often called them. More recently, Quine, or at any rate early Quine, turned his attention to the relation between language as a whole, considered as a system of propositions, and ‘experience’. Even in his pragmatism, he remained faithful to empiricism: ‘the myth of physical

objects is a device for working a manageable structure into the flux of experience' (Quine 1961: 44).

In all this, that is, in empiricism in philosophy or philosophical empiricism, language – that is the meanings of its terms and their generality, the sense of its propositions – are thought to be founded on what we experience *independently* of language. What we are so supposed to experience is thought of as 'empirical reality' with which all reality, or reality with a capital R, is equated, and our contact with it is considered to be unmediated by language. That is, that contact, usually referred to as 'sense perception', is thought of as a natural or quasi-natural process, in the way that images are formed in a mirror. We may have to learn to identify what we see, to name it, but we see what we see independently of what we learn. Or at any rate, this is considered to be so of the items that go to constitute what we see – our 'ideas' or 'sense data', so-called. Thus, empiricism in philosophy is a form of linguistic realism. Insofar as it equates all reality with empirical reality, that is with what we experience, the object of human experience, it is faced with the question whether in what we experience there is a residue that lies beyond such experience. Here a division is formed between them, such as we have between Locke and Berkeley.

Kant pointed out that 'intuitions' (what is supposed to be given or supplied by means of the senses) are 'blind' without concepts, that is apart from language – and, let me add, apart from the forms of behaviour which language extends and in which it is rooted. He also said that 'concepts without intuitions are empty'. In other words, human experience, including of course 'perceptual experience', cannot be divorced from human language, and *mutatis mutandis* human language cannot be divorced from human experience. As Wittgenstein would put it, mathematics, for instance, which he described as a 'phraseology', cannot be divorced from its application in 'civil life', and hence from the life outside the pure mathematician's study where it has many different applications.

Kant argued elaborately in his *Critique of Pure Reason*, against empiricists, that human experience is not constituted of 'ideas' or 'sense data' which are caused by an independent reality, or, in the case of hallucinations, by our brain, so that possibly the whole of what we consider to be real may be a dream. It is *essentially* directed to an object. This undercuts philosophical scepticism. For when I have a hallucination, my consciousness is object-directed; what I see is a hallucination of something, for example a dagger. This object-directed experience in the case of a hallucination is parasitic on the veridical perceptual experience. Thus, unless I know what a dagger is I cannot have a hallucination of a dagger; whatever hallucination I have, it cannot be that of a dagger. Hence unless I am capable of perceiving things, I cannot have hallucinations at all. This is how Kant puts it in a letter to Hertz:

If I had the mentality of a subhuman animal, I might have intuitions [i.e. sensations] but I should not be able to know that I have them,

and they would therefore be for me, as a cognitive being, absolutely nothing. They might still exist in me . . . exercising influence upon feeling and desire . . . without my thereby acquiring the least cognition of anything, not even of these my own states.<sup>3</sup>

When Kant says ‘they might still exist in me exercising influence upon feeling and desire’ he means, I think, that if I were, let us say, a dog, I might go after a bone, want to eat it, perhaps bury it and remember it the next day, go and dig it out and start chewing it. So, clearly, as a dog I would be able to recognise a bone when I see and smell one. I would be able to distinguish a real bone from a leather or plastic imitation one. This is something that would show in my behaviour. What I would *not* be able to do is voluntarily turn my thoughts to the bone, bring it to mind, consider it in its absence. However, even if having ‘the mentality of a subhuman animal’ enables me to be capable of only this much, I would still say that *physical reality* does figure in the life and behaviour of a creature with such a mentality. Such a creature’s behaviour is clearly directed to physical reality; undoubtedly it engages with physical things. In *human* life, such behaviour and engagement is, of course, extended in the use of language in various directions; they enter into forms of behaviour which do not exist in a dog, for instance – forms of behaviour interwoven with the use of language; in other words, what Wittgenstein calls ‘language-games’.

To return to empiricism, what makes an empirical proposition true or false is something, facts, that we establish by observation and experiment. What then is it that makes it true? What we observe. The empiricist speaks here of the proposition confronting experience, of our comparing it with what it thus confronts. But what it confronts is not experience, of course, but *what* we experience, *what* we observe, in a particular situation of our life. This is a life lived with language and the comparison takes place within a particular grammar. The criteria that we employ in our comparisons belong to and come from our language. What we compare it with, what makes it true or false, cannot be described or identified without repeating the proposition or some other proposition equivalent to it. Much of what we experience or observe, the results of our experiments if the proposition is a hypothesis in physics, is mediated by the language we speak, and, in the case of the hypothesis, by the language of physics. This is something not recognised by empiricist philosophy. It is something that Kant began to bring out.

When Wittgenstein spoke of the ‘limits of empiricism’ he meant, I think, that empiricist philosophers were taking the kind of empiricism we find in our physics and common sense, that is in verifying a proposition, checking its truth, beyond the limits within which it applies. They did so by confusing what makes a proposition true with the reality we take for granted in referring to what makes it true. Thus, in a spirit of philosophical empiricism, one may come to be tempted to say that what makes a claim such as ‘the teddy

bear from my childhood still exists' true *ultimately* is physical reality. For the teddy bear is part of physical reality: it is a physical object. So a philosopher may say: if the teddy bear exists then physical objects exist – very much as G.E. Moore argued. But 'physical object' or 'physical reality': what is that? Again the philosopher: if my teddy bear is a physical object, and physical objects exist independently of us and of our pronouncements in language, then mustn't physical reality exist independently of our language?

This is once more the idea behind the philosopher's quest for an *ultimate* justification. The empiricist philosopher goes beyond the bounds of non-philosophical empiricism in seeking such an ultimate justification of what it must be possible to attain empirically. He mislocates the concept of physical reality – a formal concept – by treating it as an ordinary, empirical concept, signifying a class of objects such as trees, mountains, houses, etc. A whale is a mammal, a mammal is an animal, an animal is a living thing, a living thing is an organism, an organism is a physical thing or object: an infinite class. This is exactly how Russell reasoned. But at the limits of what can be ascertained, verified and justified empirically, lies grammar, or what belongs to grammar, and that cannot be justified empirically.

We could sum this up: our language is not founded on an empirical reality with which we are in contact through sense perception. Rather, our language determines the kind of contact we have with such a reality and our conception of it. This is Wittgenstein's Copernican Revolution. I make no distinction between the form of that reality and our conception of it. There is no distinction between them as there is between, say, a table and our concept of a table. It is not what we experience that determines the kind of language we speak; but, rather, the kind of language we have developed, or, better, the kind of language that has developed in a society or community, determines the kind of experience that we have, as members of that community, and so the internal objects of those experiences – the form of the objects to which those experiences are directed.

The empiricist philosopher thus needs to be made to recognise that much of what is first in the senses presupposes the categories of our everyday language. For he holds the opposite of this, namely that there is nothing in language and thought that was not first in the senses. The senses, however, enter the foundations of human language and knowledge in a very different way, namely through their peculiar role in the life of those who speak our language. Both *the use of the senses* and *the use of language* are part of our natural history and they are intertwined. On the one hand, the ways in which we use our senses and the activities in which the senses play an important part, are inconceivable apart from language. On the other hand, the language we speak is one that has developed in the context of activities in all of which the use of the senses plays an important role.

The weakness of empiricism is that it gives epistemological and logical priority to the senses. When, in criticism of this, Kant said that 'intuitions

without concepts are blind' (Kant 1961 (1781/1787] A51/B75) he meant that intuitions or sensations without concepts cannot be directed to objects, they cannot amount to perceptions. Our sense organs are not 'windows to the outside world' so to speak. We use our eyes to see and that is something we learn. The use of the senses and the use of language are *interdependent*. Certain natural reactions are interwoven with both of them – with sight in animals for instance. A dog reacts in certain ways to sights and smells. One such reaction is that it may sniff what comes before its eyes – just like a child may reach for it with his hands. In the absence of such reactions we cannot attribute sight – object-directed sight – to either the dog or the child. The eyes may let in the light, images may form on the retina, and the optic nerve may conduct the electrical impulses thus generated to the brain. But still, in the absence of such reactions, the dog and the child do not see anything; they do not have anything to see. They are living organisms, but with respect to sight they are not very different from a camera that takes pictures of objects to which it is directed.

I stressed that we *use* our senses – just as we, as seeing and thinking creatures, use the camera. This is something we learn in conjunction with a great many other things. We use our senses in different situations of the life we live and within various frameworks. We look at a vase and see it, see the material of which it is made, see its shape, its colour, etc. Each of these things presuppose different frameworks within which we have learned to operate. As Wittgenstein puts it: 'Do not believe that you have the concept of colour within you because you look at a coloured object – however you look' (Z 332).

#### 4 Language and the human world

Peter Winch writes: 'God's reality is *independent* of what any man may care to think. But it is *within* the religious use of language that the conception of God's reality has its place' (Winch 1972: 12). In other words, if the religious use of language had not developed among men, if men were totally practical creatures, lived somewhat like ants, worked incessantly in order to have food and survive, co-operated instinctively, but showed no appreciation for anything, no gratitude for what they benefited from, etc. – in short if they lived a soulless existence – then, whatever language they had developed, it would not have a religious use. Such people would be recognisably different from us, they would lack much of the behaviour and many of the feelings we have. Their world, the world in which they live, would be different from ours.

Here one may ask: is it their world which is different or do they simply fail to apprehend things that *we* apprehend? The latter way of speaking presupposes that we and they share a common world, a common language. It is in that language that we may say to someone speaking our language: 'Look, you thought that what you said did not offend him; but he *was* offended.' Here

offence and being offended exist in the world of the person we are talking to; he has a conception of it, only he has missed it in this particular case. What if he is totally insensitive, always misses it? Well, then, that is precisely what we say: he is insensitive. This is a 'disorder' in him, like blindness. Could we not say that he has no conception of what others feel when hurt? Yes, perhaps he is totally egocentric: he does not have a conception which is available to him in the life and culture of the people with whom he lives. He is oblivious to something that exists or has reality in the world of his language and culture. At least there is a sense – a perfectly ordinary sense – in which he understands the meaning of the word, 'so-and-so has been offended'. Certainly he is himself capable of being offended. Offence and being offended belong to the world of his language, to its universe of discourse, but *he* is limited in his sensitivity to others.

Not everything that is alive has a life, of course. Trees are alive, but they do not have *a life*. For that to be possible, some sort of action and behaviour is needed: going after certain things, reacting to them. Such a life may of course be rich or limited. Life, in this sense, gives a living creature *a world*. We can thus speak of the world of cats, the domestic cat, for instance. A cat can be upset by the way you treat it, but it cannot be offended. It sits by a hole for hours on end, plays with a mouse before killing it, stalks birds, eats food, rubs itself against things in anticipation of something it wants, purrs when stroked, copulates. These are the things at the centre of its life, the things it knows, does and wants. They make up its world. It does not live in the same world as we do – to a large extent anyway. Many of the things with which we engage and that are, therefore, real to us, have no reality for the cat. They do not exist in or form part of its world. The cat is not merely oblivious of them. For that to be the case, they must be available to its apprehension, they must exist in the world in which cats live.

This is not like saying of a cat that it does not live in my house or garden. It does not even live in my house anyway, in the sense in which I live there. It lives there in an attenuated sense of the phrase. My house is the place it sleeps in and comes for its food. It is part of its territory. What exists in my house may be removed; I may buy some new furniture. But what exists in my world, the world I share with others, what forms part of it, cannot be removed. It may disappear, perhaps, in the course of time; but then in that respect my world, the world I share with those of my generation, would have changed.

Does that mean that there was a time when God did not exist? And does this mean that God could not have created the world as Christians believe? What the second question forgets is that, like most worlds, especially human worlds, the world to which the Christian belief in question belongs is multi-dimensional. One of its dimensions is time and the past. That is, it encompasses a time which stretches in two directions endlessly: the past and the future. So there is no problem about locating creation in the past for as

far back as you wish – in our world. As for the creation of the world itself, that is yet another matter. It is obviously not like the creation of an artefact by an artisan, a work of art by an artist. Those are events *in* the world. The creation *of* the world, therefore, cannot be like that. But this is not the place to discuss what is meant by God's creation of the world. Certainly part of what it means is that we stand in a creaturely relation to God and that everything that faces us in our life is the will of God. This raises the further question of what it means for us to stand in a creaturely relation to God – what it means for the believer to see his relation to others in that light. It raises the question of what it means to regard events in life as the will of God. But these further questions, difficult as they may be, do not raise any new problems for the relation of our life and language to our world and its dimensions of reality.

What I have argued in this section of the present chapter is that the human world with its many dimensions of reality belongs to our life and language as does our mode of existence as human beings. This world, our life and language, and our mode of existence, must have evolved together and are inseparable. I have expressed this in my own way, but I take it all from Wittgenstein. We have seen that in *Zettel* §372 he asks us to imagine a society of the feeble-minded, and comments on our inclination to think of its people as 'essentially incomplete' – that is as living in a world many aspects of which are a closed book to them.

But is a cat 'essentially incomplete' because, unlike a dog, it is aloof from those who take care of it? 'Why can't a cat be more like a dog!', its owner may say. 'Why can't it show some appreciation and gratitude; why can't it be giving; why must it be all for itself?' What in such words one fails to recognise is that a cat is a cat and lives in its own world. That world only partly coincides with a dog's world and even less, much less, with a human world. The term 'the human world', of course, is itself a generic term and covers many differences. To think of the world in which a society of the feeble-mind, such as Wittgenstein asks us to imagine, live 'under the aspect of disorder instead of a more primitive order' is like thinking of a cat as an ungrateful and narcissistic creature. As I have explained, I do not see any linguistic idealism in what Wittgenstein asks us to think in the case of his imaginary society of the feeble-minded.

## 5 Summing up

I spoke of 'our world', 'our reality' and said that 'reality' is a relative term. That sounds odd because the possessive pronoun is totally redundant in the use of our language, indeed in the use of any language. For we speak to people who share our language. But when we do philosophy and our questions lead us to consider 'what using language is' and so to consider what we take for granted in our use of language, and to imagine different languages, different uses of language, the situation changes. If we can make ourselves at home in

this new situation, we may come to appreciate that there is no reality independent of the speakers' shared reactions, engagements, life and language. Reality, if I may put it this way, is what we respond to, engage with and live in for those engagements. It is the dimensions to which what we refer to and describe in our language belongs. It is the internal or 'intentional' object of our responses, engagements and speech.

As I argued, the world in which we live, the human world, with its different dimensions of reality, has developed hand-in-glove with our life and language. They are all of a piece, and so is our mode of being in that world, what makes us human beings. They cannot be prised apart. This is very different from the claim that reality is created by language. That would be linguistic idealism. As for the existence of things that precede human existence and human language, what is in question are historical, or rather prehistorical, facts, and it takes human language to state them. The *truth* of what we thus may state, for instance that there were dinosaurs before there were any human beings, is independent of our stating it. It is, however, the *possibility* of such facts that is dependent on language and that possibility is part of what characterises our world.

I said that our conception of reality is *internal* to language and that the conceptions of reality internal to different languages do not entirely coincide. There are difficult questions here which Wittgenstein discusses in *On Certainty*, which would make the topic of another paper. But I simply want to touch very briefly on the question of whether what I have just stated is 'cultural relativism'. Cultural relativism is the claim that what is *true* in one culture may be *false* in another. In other words, it claims that *the same* belief may be true in one culture or for one people and false in another culture or for another people. I dissociate myself and Wittgenstein totally from such a claim. What is problematic here turns on the identification of the same belief in different cultures. In so far as the same belief is held in two different cultures, this is a respect in which the two cultures overlap. In such a case, if one of the two cultures regards it as true and the other as false, one or the other must be mistaken. The same belief cannot be both true and false at the same time – true for one people and false for another. But people belonging to different cultures may hold some very different beliefs from each other; people belonging to a different culture from ours may have criteria of truth incommensurable with ours. However, then the beliefs measured by such criteria would be different to what they appear to us to be, the words in which they are stated when translated to our language would be misleading. They would not mean what we may take them to mean – that is if we understand them at all.

What Wittgenstein said about someone who believes in the Last Judgement or the Resurrection and someone who does not (APR 53–5) applies here too. They may not hold opposite or contradictory beliefs to each other. What one person rejects may not be what the other believes; but this

may not be apparent to them at all. The rejecter may be far from understanding what the believer believes. They may be speaking at cross purposes to each other, reasoning within very different grammars. The rejecter may take what is in question as a scientific or quasi-scientific belief; for instance: 'Particles will rejoin in a thousand years, and there will be a Resurrection of you.' He may fail to see that it takes a religious use of language to express what the believer believes; he may even lack all conception of a religious use of language. The situation is worse in the case of beliefs held by people belonging to an alien culture.

It is easy to confuse a claim which attributes relativity to truth and one which speaks of the relativity of criteria of truth belonging to different 'language-games'. Then, in rightly wishing to reject the first, one may come to deny the second. Wittgenstein certainly upheld the second, but only the second, view; it is of a piece with the way he talked of different language-games and also different world-views.

Let me return to linguistic idealism and repeat that what it claims is a simple determination of reality by language. In the case of nominalism, this determination of reality by language is expressed in the claim that what makes different individual things the same kind of thing is simply that we call them by the same name. In contrast, what Wittgenstein brings out is that while our conception of reality is internal to our language, that language itself is rooted in a life which the speakers share. It has come to have the form it has through a process of historical development. The forms of language within which we speak and reason are conditioned by facts of our natural history and environment. This is very different indeed from linguistic idealism.

### Notes

1 See Dilman 2002 Ch. 3 section 5.

2 'Alphas' are Bambrough's example of a supreme kind of arbitrariness, a word which is supposed to name each of a random collection of objects. See Bambrough 1960–1961: 199–200.

3 Quoted in Bennett 1966: 104–5.

# WHAT ARE PSYCHOLOGICAL CONCEPTS FOR?

*Jane Heal*

## 1 Introduction

We may distinguish at least two forms of scepticism about the mind and psychological notions. The most familiar is other minds scepticism. It presents us with a conception of the contrast between inner and outer, and a related conviction of the necessary privacy of the mental, which we find immensely gripping but which threatens to make facts about others' thoughts epistemically inaccessible to us. The outlook to which we are tempted is one on which we allow that other minds exist but suppose that they must remain unknown. Wittgenstein has a good deal to say about this form of scepticism, but these issues are not our concern here. Rather, what I hope to do is bring some Wittgensteinian techniques and ideas to bear on another form of sceptical thought about the mental, or at least one version of it. This form of sceptical thought is more akin to moral scepticism than the familiar other minds scepticism. Its target is the very idea that there are or could be facts which are reported by sentences using psychological vocabulary.

Such 'eliminativism' comes in a variety of forms, some of which concentrate on supposed a posteriori difficulties for the existence of the mental and others of which invoke more a priori arguments.<sup>1</sup> The particular line of thought which is our topic calls on both a priori and a posteriori considerations and starts from the assumption of a link between thought and rationality.<sup>2</sup> What it pursues are considerations in favour of eliminativism which are likely to seem compelling when we locate the idea of a link between thought and rationality in an intellectual context where we take for granted that our psychological thought and talk has a similar role in our lives to that of theoretical talk in natural science. Section 2 considers how this idea, if combined with a bold and simple definition of rationality, leads very directly to eliminativism. Section 3 explores ways of evading the conclusion by adjusting our account of rationality. Section 4 argues that even if this succeeds we shall find other considerations, even more deeply rooted in the context, which combine to make eliminativism attractive.

Section 5 will sketch an alternative conception of rationality of signifi-

cantly different shape from that considered earlier. Section 6 examines the links of this concept to forms of interaction with others and occasions for the deployment of psychological concepts which were backgrounded or overlooked in the account given earlier. We might thus regard section 6 as assembling reminders about actual occasions of use of psychological concepts, i.e. about what some might call the ‘nature of the language games’ in which they are employed. Finally, section 7 will return to the issue of eliminativism and make some suggestions on how the alternative conception of rationality may suggest ways of avoiding at least some eliminativist pressures.

It should be emphasised that this chapter traces only one strand of reflection on the relation of psychological and physical. A fuller account would weave in the ideas suggested here with other lines of thought concerning, for example, the supervenience of psychological on physical or the issue of the possibly different explananda of physical and psychological explanations. It is also the case that this chapter presupposes some sympathy with the idea that natural science should not overly dominate our conception of what it is for something to be a fact. Those who find this broadly Wittgensteinian idea congenial but would like some more suggestions on the different roles in our lives of the psychological and the physical will find relevant considerations here. But a full scale engagement with the rights, wrongs and temptations of reductive naturalism is well beyond the scope of what can be attempted in this chapter.

## 2 Rationality, prediction and eliminativism

The line of thought we are to examine takes off from a frequently made assumption, which we shall not question, that there is some close link between the notions of thought and rationality. An initial statement of the view says that any being to whom intentional states can be truly attributed must be rational. How we understand this will alter as we proceed, but this rough and ready formulation will do as a starting point.

Let us now focus on the version of this idea articulated by Dennett. He proposes that there are different ‘stances’ which one might take up when attempting to predict the behaviour of some complex item, for example a machine or person. First there is the physical stance, where one predicts on the basis of knowledge of the material composition and structure of the item. Next there is the design stance where one relies on information about what the item has been constructed to do. Finally there is the intentional stance where one assumes that the item is a rational agent, attributes to it the goals and information it ought to have given its situation and predicts that it will act as it ought rationally to do given those goals and that information.<sup>3</sup> The intentional stance is what we take when we use psychological concepts.

This line of thought is quite explicit in its claim that the purpose of taking the intentional stance is the same as the purpose of taking the physical

stance, namely the generation of predictions. Ability to predict the behaviour of physical objects is important to us because it enables us to anticipate good happenings, to mitigate bad ones and because it connects with our ability to control events, in those cases where we can ourselves influence the occurrence or non-occurrence of circumstances in which a given event is predicted to occur. Accepting all this does not commit us to a crudely pragmatic or technological view of the value of science. Of course we can also allow that scientific understanding is worthwhile and fascinating for its own sake. But it is clear that the major practical import of natural science is in the area of prediction and control. To identify the intentional stance as an alternative to the physical stance – i.e. take it as a way of doing the same thing as could be done by taking the physical stance – is tacitly to assume that our relations to other human beings are of the same very broad kind as our relations to inanimate objects; it is to take it that both people and objects are things in our environment the behaviour of which may impinge on us pleasantly or unpleasantly and which we therefore seek to anticipate and influence to our advantage.

The upshot of this complex of ideas is that a certain conception of how we use the rationality assumption, is presented to us. It goes like this: we know such and such about others' current situation, centrally their beliefs and desires; we wish to generate predictions of their further thoughts or behaviour; our tool in doing so is a rationality assumption. On this conception the rationality assumption is conceived as analogous to a physical theory, for example some set of equations governing the evolution of the physical magnitudes in a system, which can be used in conjunction with information about the current state of that system, to generate a prediction of its future states.

This view of the large scale structure of our position vis-à-vis others then has further implications for how the rationality assumption itself is to be unpacked. The content of the assumption needs, like that of a physical theory, to be rich enough to generate determinate predictions, given a whole variety of different inputs about initial conditions. Also, like a physical theory, it needs to be general in that it applies to all beings to whom intentional states are attributed. The difference from physical theory is that it will not be based on empirical observation. Rather, it will be normatively based, calling centrally upon the idea of what ought to be thought or done, given such and such initial beliefs and desires.

So for an understanding of the content of the rationality assumption so conceived we turn naturally to those who study the normative aspects of reasoning, in logic, decision theory and the like. At this point in developing the line of thought matters become less clear. Certainly deductive logicians offer some definite normative demands. For example they offer the ideal of consistency (believing no contradictions) and completeness (believing all the logical consequences of what one believes). But for non-deductive reasoning

and practical reasoning matters are less agreed. There are unclarities (e.g. about the nature and defensibility of inference to the best explanation) and unresolved paradoxes (e.g. Newcomb's paradox).<sup>4</sup>

The fact that we do not have a complete agreed account of rationality may be read merely as parallel to the fact that we do not yet have a complete physics. The lack of a complete physics means only that taking the physical stance to an item is to be construed as assuming that it obeys the laws of physics, whatever they are. Insofar as I know some of them I can predict it, but where my knowledge runs out, so too does my ability to predict. Analogously, one might say, taking the intentional stance to an item is to be construed as assuming that it obeys the dictates of rationality, whatever they are. Again, insofar as I know them, I can predict it and where I do not, I must give up.<sup>5</sup> Let us for the moment overlook these complications of our limited knowledge and imagine that we have some package of demands of rationality, including at least consistency and completeness in belief together with some other suitable elements, which is agreed to spell out (at least a substantial part of) what rationality demands.

We should at this point note a verbal difficulty in specifying what rationality requires, given our assumption of a constitutive connection between rationality and intentional states. Stating conditions for rationality as having to do with relations between beliefs (e.g. 'a person is rational only if all her beliefs are consistent') seems to suggest the possibility of beliefs which are not consistent. A more guarded statement would say that when considering if a being is rational one needs to look at its candidate intentional states, i.e. candidate beliefs and candidate intentions, where these are thought of as states with apparent content. I shall on occasion use this more verbose terminology where the argument requires clarity. If such candidate states fulfil the requirements of rationality then they are admitted to be real intentional states. If however they fail the requirements of rationality then, given the strong constitutive link, they have to be denied the status of real intentional states. This is indeed the route the eliminativist takes.

Thus far we have been pursuing claims supposedly available to us *a priori*, about the connection of thought and rationality and about the nature of rationality. Now we come to the *a posteriori* premises of the eliminativist argument. Observation shows, it is said, that the others we seek to predict fall short of the prescriptions of rationality. This is obviously so, independent of any worries about what exactly the requirements of rationality are. Let us consider just consistency and completeness. Satisfying the demand for consistency is, given the immense number of different (candidate) beliefs each of us possesses, an enormous task. We do not have the time or resources to do the necessary cross checking and the chances are that all of us have at least some inconsistent (candidate) beliefs. Satisfying the demand for completeness is even worse. Although each of us has an immense number of (candidate) beliefs, there is still a gap between it and the number of beliefs

(viz. infinitely many) which we would have if we were to deduce all the consequences of the beliefs we do have. (Consider, for example, all the truths of elementary arithmetic and geometry, to say nothing of the endless trivial empirical truths now deductively available to me, such as that I have more blue socks than there have been English kings called 'Henry').

If we insist that satisfying the demands of rationality is necessary for being a believer, it follows from this shortfall that others do not really have the beliefs we credit them with. Certainly (we may say) people behave up to a point as if they were believers and we find it useful predictively to treat them as if they satisfied the norms and infer some of their (candidate) beliefs and intentions from others; indeed we have no other option because it is unmanageably complicated to take the physical or the design stance towards people. But (it seems natural to continue) using the thought attributions licensed by the intentional stance is just an instrumentally useful way of carrying on. It is not to be taken as description of fact.

### 3 An avenue of escape?

How might one seek to evade this unwelcome conclusion while retaining the central elements of the stance idea? One move would be to suggest that talk of rationality is like talk of frictionless slopes or rigid levers, namely a simplification and idealisation of the kind often found in science. Although no slope is ever entirely frictionless nor any lever entirely rigid, nevertheless some may be nearly frictionless or rigid; some slopes and levers have real properties to which the idealised versions are pretty close. Similarly, even if we are not perfectly rational, nevertheless we are nearly rational and talk of our rationality (and relatedly of our beliefs) latches on to some reality which is not intolerably distorted by the representation.

But a move of this shape is not defensible in the rationality case. Given the demandingness of rationality as currently conceived there is not merely a slight looseness of fit between what it requires and what we are capable of. There is a vast gap. The fact is that we are not even nearly rational, in the highly demanding sense of 'rational'. Taking us to be rational in this sense is more like envisaging the heavenly bodies as attached to a collection of crystal spheres than it is like treating an iron bar as a rigid lever. The sphere idea is indeed useful for certain predictive purposes, but the gap between how things actually are and how things need to be for it to be strictly true is so big that the only sensible thing to do is to take the idea instrumentally, and hence to be an eliminativist about crystal spheres.

Another move of a similar kind is explored by Dennett. To speak of rationality being manifested in some stretch of speech and behaviour is, he suggests, like speaking of a pattern as being present in some array of dots. We may allow that a certain pattern is 'really' present in an array even if the presence of some errors or distortions mean that the array is not a perfect specimen of the pattern.<sup>6</sup>

Again the size of the gap between what rationality requires and what we actually do makes this an unpersuasive position, if we are assuming the above-sketched demanding version of rationality. Suppose we have an array of dots which can be seen as a hand but it is placed in the midst of random confusion of other dots. It would be stretching things exceedingly to say that a pattern representing a whole human body was, albeit in a patchy and imperfect way, present. Too much of the human-body pattern is missing for this to be a defensible move. Similarly it may be that a few of our remarks and pieces of behaviour hang together in a way which suggests to the fully rational observer from Mars that we are similarly rational. Further investigation, however, will show so much to be missing, in the form of further claims we should make and further actions we should undertake were we really rational, that the observer would be sensible to abandon the idea, or to treat it where used as merely instrumental.

However, versions of these moves might work if we could combine them with cutting down the notion of rationality, to make it less demanding.<sup>7</sup> The rationality assumption will need still to have some rich, determinate and general content, otherwise it will not be analogous to physical theory and will not have the power to generate interesting predictions over the full range of cases. But if the notion of rationality invoked were less perfectionist then there might be some hope of our (at least nearly) conforming to its norms and so being properly taken as the subjects of intentional states. A plausible way of cutting down starts from the fact that we have only finite resources of time and logical acumen. Hence only certain inferences, those which are fairly short and simple in structure, are psychologically feasible for us. Moreover, many of the inferences which are feasible concern subject matters which are not worth thinking about (for example relations between my socks and the kings of England), so that it would be silly for a finite creature to waste its resources on them.

Given these facts, we might propose an account of rationality along these lines: a person is rational if she makes a fair number of the feasible inferences available to her on matters of interest, and does not make too many mistakes.<sup>8</sup> A detailed spelling out of the rationality assumption would then list the kinds of inference which are feasible for humans (for example, use of the natural deduction rules of elementary logic, some simple moves in probability calculus, employment of basic arithmetic, simple induction ...) and specify the kinds of lengths of chains of reasoning a rational person should be able to undertake. It would need also to lay out analogous things about the kinds of practical reasoning to be expected of a rational person, for example, how many different alternatives are to be weighed, what kinds of comparison made, etc.

The general account of rationality suggested here is interestingly vague. What it gestures towards is not one notion but rather a family of notions, defined by interpreting crucial terms such as 'fair number', 'not too many'

or ‘feasible’ in different ways. There is, as we shall see later, something right about allowing this flexibility. We do indeed expect different standards of reasoning from people with different backgrounds and training. But it is an unwelcome complexity from the point of view we are exploring and brings a threat of ambiguity and loss of unity in psychological notions.

For example we may construct two different ways of spelling out rationality in detail, one of which does and one of which does not include enough grip on probability to avoid falling for the gambler’s fallacy. On the one hand, predicting a ten-year-old child with the package including sophisticated grip on probability is likely to produce the wrong results and would suggest that the child did not really believe that nine fair tosses of the fair coin had produced nine heads. (If she really believed that, she would not now be giving greater probability to a tail next time.) On the other hand, predicting the professional gambler with the even more cut-down version would equally produce the wrong results. A third option would be to use different packages of demands for different people. But if we do this, and thus get the correct predictions for both child and gambler, then, *prima facie*, we have got two different senses of ‘rational’ in play. This then threatens the idea that we have one univocal notion of ‘belief’, since belief is defined by its link with rationality.

Thus, the cutting down strategy offers us the chance of crafting a conception of rationality which we might have some hope of (at least nearly) instantiating and so it seems to offer the chance of avoiding eliminativism while retaining the ‘intentional stance’ idea. But the strategy also generates various questions. There are many different ways of cutting down. If we are to avoid ‘belief’ becoming ambiguous, we must, it seems, fix on just one revised package. But why should we favour one over another out of the multiplicity available? And if we do hit on one, how are we to explain what seems a plain fact that we do use different assumptions about reasoning when thinking about different individuals?

I do not say that these questions are unanswerable within the context of the approach we are exploring, merely that they pose problems for it. (We shall return to these issues later; and see how they can be naturally resolved in the context of a rethinking of the rationality assumption and its role for us.) But for the moment, let us imagine them dealt with and thus imagine that arguments for eliminativism generated by the immense gap between actual performance and norms has also been dealt with. The next section will suggest that even so we are not free of the eliminativist threats.

#### **4 Another argument for eliminativism**

Here is another line of thought on which the sort of view we are considering pushes us in the direction of eliminativism. This line has plausibility whether we take rationality in the perfectionist way contemplated in section 2 or in some cut-down version as suggested in section 3.

It is sometimes proposed as a further element of the approach we are exploring that the usefulness of predictions generated by the rationality assumption is, by itself, sufficient for rationality and hence belief. All there is (it is said) to being a believer is being usefully predictable by taking the intentional stance. To be rational a being need only have its candidate intentional states conform to the patterns prescribed. The issue of how that conformity comes about is irrelevant. The attraction of this further assumption to many philosophers is that we can now give full recognition to the discoveries of natural science, in particular the workings of natural selection, in suggesting explanations of how the observed patterns of behaviour came to be shaped. We do not have to acknowledge any explanatory factors other than those operating in the inanimate natural world.

I would suggest, however, that this seeming strength of the proposal is also a source of weakness – namely, of the persisting sense that it is eliminativist. In fact, our notion of rationality when unpacked also assigns a further, and as yet unmentioned, role to the norms of rationality, apart from that of prescribing patterns among candidate intentional states. It gives the norms an explanatory force in the generation of the beliefs or actions which constitute the patterns. Some familiar kinds of thought experiment will serve to make this claim plausible. Consider a being who, regarded externally, satisfies whatever version of rationality we have hit on but only (as it turns out) because every possible individual apparently inferential move has been programmed in through an immense set of post-hypnotic suggestions. It seems unhappy to say that this being is rational. Her sets of candidate beliefs may indeed cause other candidate beliefs, but the driving force of the transitions is entirely unconnected with their normative status.

The conclusion from this thought experiment is that when we link intentional states and rationality, and attribute both of them to a creature, we commit ourselves to the propriety of some story invoking norms in explaining the behaviour of that creature. It is not just the surface contours of the behaviour which are important to us; the routes by which things come about are important as well. To be rational is not merely to conform to but to respond to the norms of rationality. So, taking a particular case, let us consider someone inferring that  $q$  from  $p$ . Here an event of adding a belief that  $q$  to a belief that  $p$  occurs. Suppose moreover we agree that it ought to occur, in that inferring  $q$  from  $p$  satisfies the norms of rationality. Seeing the inference as a response to the norms of rationality is, in effect, adding further that it occurs because it ought to occur.

Now it would indeed be extremely odd to suppose that normative facts have some direct quasi-causal influence on movement of matter in space and time. We can avoid that particular sense of uneasiness by taking it that norms exert their influence only via the medium of a mind which can become aware of and responsive to them. So norms get a foothold in the spatio-temporal world by figuring as the content of spatio-temporally located states and

happenings, namely the awarenesses and thinkings of persons. That, at first sight, looks more intelligible than the idea of norms exerting direct causal influence over matter. But even here, we still need to explain how norms impress themselves upon human beings.

If I am right that the assumption of rationality assigns an explanatory role to norms, then to avoid eliminativism we need to amend the account we have been giving of the content of the rationality assumption and its role in our thought to reflect this. But it is difficult to see how this can be done in the framework of the current account. That account says that the rationality assumption is a tool for achieving a goal, namely prediction of happenings, which could also be achieved by doing natural scientific theorising. So it cannot but seem appropriate to compare the rationality assumption (with its corollary of an explanatory role for norms) to the postulation of such things as molecular mechanisms, genes and natural selection, with respect to how accurately each represents how things come about. In a confrontation conceived this way the norm-free entities and forces of natural science win hands down. If we focus on human beings as a suitable subject for natural science and construe adoption of the intentional stance as an attempt at the very same predictive job as is done by natural science, we cannot but accept that it is the interactions at the molecular level which do the real causing, and so provide the real explanations and the more solid underpinning of the predictions. Other things can be allowed genuine explanatory roles only if they are constructs out of, or reducible to, physical complexes. Norms cannot be so regarded. Hence, assigning an explanatory role to norms can only be instrumentally construed.

The difficulty can be illustrated by considering again Dennett's pattern analogy. We can imagine an imperfect version of a pattern appearing in an array of dots by a process in which a perfect version of the pattern is copied by an error-prone process. But there are other ways in which exactly the same array might emerge which assign no role at all to any perfect version of the pattern. Dennett is concerned to stress that his picture of the emergence of rationality-patterns is the second and not the first. But if the intentional story is not to be merely instrumental, the norms of rationality need to get in on the act, as things which persons are aware of and strive (sometimes unsuccessfully) to conform to. Therefore, they need to play the role which the perfect version of the copied pattern might play. The possibility of their playing any such role has, however, been pre-empted by the molecular and evolutionary story. To contemplate giving such a role to the set of norms that define rationality forces us into highly suspect metaphysics. We shall need to postulate 'top-down' causation by non-material forces or immaterial souls capable of intuiting platonic realms. If we do not think like this, how are we to get the norms into some explanatory relation with the occurrences which are said to manifest a creature's rationality? There seems no respectable way to do so. The upshot is that an important element of our conception of

thought and its link with rationality is not allowed for on this account of how we use the rationality assumption. The rationality is not really there in the sense of ‘really there’ which we would like.

The root of the trouble, on the diagnosis I am offering, is the idea that psychological thinking serves the same large-scale purpose as natural scientific thinking. This idea has two corollaries. One is that it forces us to construe rationality as the achievement of an actual performance of conforming to some determinate demands. If we do not construe it like this then the rationality assumption is of no use for generating predictions. It follows from this that accommodating an explanatory role for norms must take the form of finding an explanatory role for these particular demands. The other corollary is that the approach leads us to locate the idea of norms playing an explanatory role in the same logical space as, and hence as a rival to, the idea of molecular linkages, natural selection, etc., playing an explanatory role. The upshot of the two corollaries working together is that an explanatory role for norms gets envisaged as a kind of mysterious, non-natural top-down causation by a particular package of norms, and so has to be rejected. Eliminativism is the outcome.

## 5 A two-element conception of rationality

Let us see if we can extricate ourselves from this unfortunate position. We shall first, in this section, sketch another kind of account of what it is to be rational. Section 6 will then explore its implications for the nature of psychological concepts and for the kinds of interactions with others in which they figure. In these two sections we shall ignore questions about the defensibility of the picture sketched. We shall return to this issue, and to the topic of eliminativism, in the final section.

The idea of rationality explored in the previous sections insists that a rational person actually achieves a specified standard in thought, in that his or her candidate intentional states do indeed exhibit certain patterns, which are exemplifications of a designated package of inferential moves. Let us consider instead an account which emphasises that a person’s rationality is a capacity rather than a particular achievement. On this view, rationality cannot be captured in one list of fulfilled demands but rather consists, in any person, of two elements of very different logical kinds. The first is something which every rational person shares with every other rational person, namely a grasp on the high level and general notion of there being better and worse in inferential transitions between thoughts. The second element varies from person to person and from time to time and is what we may call a particular ‘inferential outlook’. A person’s inferential outlook at a time is the assemblage of his or her views at that time about what transitions in thought are approvable and disapprovable.

Grasp of the high-level notion is shown by effective engagement in a

certain practice, namely that of asking about and assessing inferences or reasoning. For example, a person may consider such questions as 'In the light of so and so, would it be proper to think that such and such?' or 'Does so and so follow from such and such?' or 'Is this a reason for that?' And perhaps he or she may point out some transition in thought and then condemn or commend it. ('I used to think that a run of heads made a tail more likely on the next toss. But now I see that was wrong.') The second element is shown in the actual inferential transitions which an individual makes, whether unreflectively or as mediated by formulated rules. It may also be shown in such things as the examples of good and bad reasoning he or she would cite and in whatever explicit theorising about reasoning he or she has engaged in. There is, of course, a close relation between the two elements. The second will develop and change over time, in response to teaching and through reflection and experience, as the person has occasions to exercise the first.

What is meant by 'effective' in the above mention of 'effective engagement in the practice of asking about and assessing inferences'? Effective engagement is not mere willingness to utter verbal formulae such as 'Is this a good reason for that?' but requires that actual progress be made, i.e. sensible answers be offered, or at least moves relevant to a sensible answer, when such questions are raised. It is not required however that all questions be answered correctly, still less that they be answered quickly and easily. But a person cannot be said to engage effectively in the practice, and hence to have grasp of the general and high level notion, unless some progress is made on a good number of occasions.

A comparison with sight may be useful here. To credit someone with sight is to credit him or her with a capacity which, if exercised in not too unfavourable conditions, results in acquisition of information about the shapes, sizes and relative positions of objects in the world around. But to have sight a person does not require to be able to answer infallibly and easily all questions on these subject matters, still less already actually to possess complete knowledge of the spatial layout of the whole universe. Rather, to have sight he or she needs to understand what shape, size and position are and to have ability to set about getting answers to a good range of particular questions about them, by undertaking suitable kinds of looking. Actually achieving answers may be easy in some cases, where an enquirer just needs to take a quick glance, but extremely difficult in others, where she has to resort to examining a situation from many angles, to asking others who have better close or long distance vision, to microscopes, telescopes and the like. Possession of sight is compatible with discovery that there are some areas of the spatial universe which it is impossible that we should ever see, for example those which are too distant from us or in some way blocked off, like the inside of black holes. Also possession of sight does not require an individual to be free from liability to visual illusions. Nor does it require that a person be willing to put in the effort of looking and finding out about shapes, sizes

and positions, on all occasions when questions arise. He or she may be too lazy, preoccupied, prejudiced, drunk etc.

We may develop the parallel between rationality and possession of sight as follows. It is a presupposition of the whole debate we are conducting that there is a realm of norms. It is not scepticism about norms we are considering but eliminativism about the intentional. This realm contains, for example, all the facts about what entails what, since these fill in the detailed requirements of the norm of thought that it is wrong to combine belief in a premise with belief in the negation of something entailed by that premise. It will also contain plenty of other norms as well, for example about what intentions are justified by what considerations. Thus, it will contain norms relevant to practical as well as to theoretical thought. Indeed it is impossible for a finite creature to separate the two completely, since theoretical reflection is a resource-consuming activity, and so the values of truth-detection and falsehood-avoidance which it pursues will always need to be weighed against other values we could promote by use of the same resources. To credit someone with the first element in the two-element conception of rationality, i.e. with ability to engage effectively in the practice of asking about and assessing reasons for forming beliefs and intentions, is in effect to credit that person with a capacity for coming to know at least something about this realm of norms.<sup>9</sup>

Given this, we may transfer to the subject matter of norms everything we have said about sight. Thus, some parts of the realm of norms we may discover to be very difficult or impossible of access. (For example, some kinds of proofs are so complex that we have great trouble in grasping them. Or perhaps there are certain kinds of proofs which, because infinitary in a particular way, we see that we can never master.) Further, to be rational we do not require to have already total grasp of all entailment relations, together with all the other facts about good and bad in reasoning.<sup>10</sup> Moreover we may be rational even if we are liable to some illusions about inferential connections. And we may be rational even if we are sometimes too lazy, prejudiced or drunk to exercise our capacity to assess reasoning.

We should ask at this point what is involved in exercising the first element, i.e. in reflecting effectively on a question such as 'Does this follow from that?' One model of such reflection is that it must be the application of a decision procedure. The account fits some cases tolerably well. For example if I wonder whether it follows from the fact that I have  $12 \times 12$  apples that I have fewer than  $11 \times 14$  apples, then a systematic check through my stock of available clear cut ways of settling questions will turn up procedures for calculating and comparing numbers which can be applied to derive an answer. But not all cases are like this. Sometimes a question arises from some doubt about how to apply an existing rule or from appearance of a case to which no existing rule seems to apply. In such situations we are not always completely at a loss. Rather, we are thrown back on a variety of less formal

moves, such as looking for hitherto unrecognised analogies, seeking new distinctions, wondering if insertion of new variables might help and the like. The kinds of casting about we can engage in are open ended and can interact with each other and with the material thought about in many complex ways. So what the casting about consists in, by what transformations of thought it leads to new insights (if it does), is something of which we can only give the above, hand-waving, sort of account. This is not surprising, since what we are talking about is precisely the skill of dealing with situations where explicitly formulated rules give out.

Persons may differ very substantially from each other in their actual inferential outlooks and in how much self-conscious and explicit grip they have on the norms of inference. But if a person is to reflect effectively on some particular question about reasoning he or she must have already to hand at least some materials with which to think about the issue, for example some already recognised specimens of good reasoning, some rules for assessment, some techniques of analysing, analogising or extrapolating. So grasp of the general notion of better and worse in inference cannot be had without actual applications of the notion being made. It does not follow, however, that there is one fixed set of specimens, rules or techniques which is always associated with grasp of the general notion. Nor does it follow that every question must be handled with the same set of tools or that there is only one set of starting materials for effectively tackling a given particular question. It is also true that if people are to discuss issues about good inference they need to share some common ground of particular judgements and techniques to start with. But again it does not follow that it is the same common ground on every occasion.

All of the moves mentioned towards the end of the last paragraph are examples of the familiar ‘quantifier shift’ fallacy where a correct claim of the weak ‘for all  $X$ , there is some  $Y$  which . . .’ form are misconstrued as claims of the stronger ‘there is some  $Y$ , such that for all  $X$ , it . . .’ form. Were the quantifier shift move valid, there would be grounds for saying that the two-element view of rationality was not really all that different from the earlier view, since we would be able to suggest that one and the same package (e.g. one set of specimens, rules and techniques) was required to be present in every case of effective thinking about inferences and hence is definitive of rationality. Part of the interest of the two-element account is precisely that it need not be spelled out in this way and is open to the idea that effective thinking about reasons can be extremely various.

## 6 Prediction, discussion and excuse

Suppose that we think of ourselves and others as rational in the sense sketched in section 5, what forms of interaction with others might we engage in?

Would the assumption that others were rational, together with information about their beliefs and desires, enable us to predict their further thoughts and actions – and relatedly to control or manipulate them in some circumstances? The answer is that the mere claim of rationality, by itself, does little to help prediction or control. That claim says only that the rational person grasps the general notion of better and worse in inference and possesses also some or other current inferential outlook. To arrive at predictions we need knowledge of what this particular outlook is, which will vary considerably from person to person depending on upbringing, natural acuity, experience etc. (We need also knowledge of such things as how willing the person is to exercise his or her capacity to reason at this time.) It is these specifics about the individual which do all the work, and not any supposed generally applicable prediction machinery use of which is licensed by the attribution of rationality. Certainly we may use inductive evidence as well as evidence derived from interaction with the individual, to arrive at views about an individual's likely inferential outlook. ('The average ten year old reasons like this: . . . ' 'Most professors of logic are capable of . . . ' etc.) So in practice the derivation of a prediction will proceed in some cases as if one were applying a standard package. But the underpinning of the proceeding is now quite differently envisaged.

On this view of how generation of specific predictions occurs the first element in the two-element rationality conception plays no role. How then can its presence in our thinking be significant? The answer is that it underpins kinds of interaction between people in which psychological concepts are invoked but which are overlooked, or in so far as noticed wrongly interpreted, on the earlier prediction-centred account.

Let us consider just two of these. The first is inviting and participating in joint consideration of some question about reasoning in which both of us are, or can be brought to be, interested. For a schematic example, imagine that you and I are in the grip of the gambler's fallacy but that you are beginning to have doubts about whether it really does follow from the fact that there has been a run of heads in coin tossing that a tail is more likely next time. You invite me to reflect, saying 'What do you think? It somehow seems obvious that a tail must be more likely, since long runs of heads are unlikely and one should not expect the unlikely. Yet surely there's something to be said on the other side too, since the coin is fair and that means that the chances of tails must be evens.' By your question I am induced to think about the issue and after some to and fro discussion (including perhaps consideration of whether 'likely' is an absolute or a relative characterisation, of how and when to apply the maxim 'don't expect the unlikely' and so forth) we see what our mistake was and reform our inferential outlooks accordingly.

You may initiate such a dialogue by asking me a question when you already know what my current inferential outlook is and are thus in an excellent position to make specific predictions about me and to manipulate my

behaviour if you wish to do so. What makes it sensible to ask me is not this specific knowledge but the fact that you think that I am capable of changing my outlook for the better by reflecting on it. You pose the question to me because you hope, from sharing any insights I may come up with, that we shall both end up with a better grip on the topic than we had before. The presupposition which makes your move sensible is your commitment to the presence in me of the first element of the two-element conception.

Discussions of such kinds are notable contexts for uses of psychological terms. ('What do you think?' 'I am inclined to suppose . . .', 'I used to take it that . . . but now I am more doubtful, because . . .', 'I'm quite certain that . . . but less certain that . . .') It is notable that dialogues of somewhat similar import could occur in which there was no use of psychological terms. ('Is it the case that . . .', 'Perhaps not, because . . .', etc.) Nevertheless, the psychological terms are not otiose. They serve to make explicit that you and I are aware of each other as fellow thinkers and that it is precisely the sharing of your thinking on the matter which I invite.<sup>11</sup>

The suggestion of the last three paragraphs is that psychological terms are centrally at home in dialogues such as the one about the gambler's fallacy and that it is the rationality conception outlined in section 5 which best makes sense of them. But can the earlier account, the prediction-centred one, also make sense of such dialogues?

How does that earlier account explain asking another 'What do you think about . . .?' There seem to be two sorts of occasion which it can easily accommodate. The first is occasions on which asking someone 'What do you think?' is like checking the oil in a car, namely a procedure designed to elicit information which one will use in prediction. I do not at all want to deny that questions about others' thoughts may have this role. But the gambler's fallacy dialogue is not of this kind; you do not plan to make use of my answer in working out what I am going to do.

The second is occasions when you may use another person like a calculator, asking, for example, 'What do you think is the product of 57 and 692?' because you know that the other is quicker and more accurate at doing sums than you are yourself. Here you are not interested in predicting the other's behaviour but in reading the arithmetical facts off from her answer. This is a particular example of the fact that of course we do not always use prediction-relevant facts about an item in predicting that item. We may instead use them to derive information about some other part of the world. So you may be interested in the temperature of the oil in your car not because of its effects on the car but because of its diagnostic role *vis-à-vis* some fact external to the car. Similarly, you may be interested in another's arithmetical opinions because you take it that you can read off from them to the arithmetical facts.

This second sort of enquiry after another's beliefs may seem to be more like our dialogue. Your question may be presented as designed to get me to

evolve into an inner state, which I then express to you, where you can read off from that inner state whether or not a run of heads makes a tail more likely. Reflection suggests, however, that this construal of matters is seriously distorting. In the gambler's fallacy case, you indeed want my help in thinking and suppose that I may have something useful to say. But you do not know how I will tackle the question (*ex hypothesi*, the question is one in handling which we do not have well-recognised procedures) and you are not committed to accepting what I offer. Even if you have some inductive evidence from other occasions of my abilities in coming up with helpful reflections in puzzling cases, whether or not you do so here will depend upon whether my suggestions make sense to you.

Another kind of interaction underpinned by the first element in the two-element conception revolves around disagreement and excuse. The same gambler's fallacy case can be pressed into service again, in a slightly different format, to illustrate the idea. Suppose that I have fallen for the fallacy and say that a tail is more likely next time, whereas you, having always had at the forefront of your mind that the coin is a fair one, insist that the chances are evens. How are we to respond to our difference?

One possibility is that we write each other off as confused or partially irrational and do not bother to look into possible explanations of what seems to each to be the other's mistake. But another possibility is that we investigate our difference, with a view to testing the credentials of each view and finding a particular kind of account of whichever turns out to be in error, namely an account which shows that arriving at that error was, all the same, an exercise of rationality. The result of such a discussion is (perhaps) that we both come to appreciate that my mistake is the result of having an oversimple conception of 'the unlikely' and so of applying the rule 'Don't expect the unlikely' in an inappropriate way.

My having such an oversimple conception is an unfortunate feature of my earlier state of mind. But it is not one which shows that I do not satisfy the two-element conception of rationality. Given our limited cognitive resources, it is good policy to stick with simple concepts until one is forced to make matters more complicated. Certainly I learn something important from the discussion, namely that 'likelihood' is more complicated than I had assumed. But it may also be that you learn something. For example, you are made aware of the possibility of this simpler (and as it turns out inadequate) way of conceptualising matters.

We can imagine also other cases of a different structure, where discussion of disagreement might result in both parties shifting their views, each recognising some merit in the other's concepts and contentions and so coming to an enriched understanding. For example, very schematically, we might have a case of disagreement about action, where in effect one person was applying a deontological and another a consequentialist mode of appraisal to the situation. Discussion might enable both parties to come to a more complex,

if less easy and simple, appreciation of the costs and benefits of the various options available.

As we saw in sections 2 and 3, the earlier construals of rationality which we considered arose from assimilating what we do with psychological concepts to what we do with the concepts of natural science, namely formulating claims which will enable us to make predictions about items around us. In doing this we were implicitly assimilating our relations to other people to our relations with complex items in our environment such as plants and machines. The thrust of the remarks of this section could be put the following way.

We can, if we insist, describe the situations that we have discussed in terms of prediction and manipulation. For example, it is your belief that I can think effectively about better and worse in inference which licenses you to predict that you may get some helpful remarks from me if you ask me to reflect on some question. It is because you desire this potential benefit from me that you prod me with your question. Similarly asking me to explain myself may result in my saying things which will enable you to see me as rational (rather than as just mad or muddled) and will give you a better grip on my particular inferential outlook. Both of these things may contribute to your future ability to predict or guide my behaviour.

But forcing things thus into the prediction and control pattern is achieved only by verbal manoeuvres, for example by weakening the content of predictions until they become extremely unspecific ('the other may say something helpful', 'the other may be able to offer reasons for what at present looks mad'). Moreover, if we insist on foregrounding this way of describing things then we overlook a more revealing account of what goes on. Other people are not devices which we try to operate, endeavouring to cause them to do this or that useful manoeuvre. Rather, they are fellow human beings with whom we talk, with whom we co-operate on shared projects, from whom we ask help when we are muddled and with whom we seek to forge a jointly created and growing understanding. Something went missing right at the beginning of that earlier train of thought, when we placed the physical stance and the intentional stance side by side as alternative ways of achieving the same goal.

## 7 Eliminativism again

What I have sketched in the previous two sections is an account of a kind of creature, one possessing certain distinctive capacities, and of a kind of interaction which creatures of this kind might undertake with each other. My hope is that it will be found plausible as a sketch of how we actually think of ourselves and interact with each other, more plausible than the proposal that we take ourselves to be rational in the senses canvassed in the earlier sections 2, 3 and 4. To repeat a crucial difference, in the conception of sections 5 and 6 there is no one identifiable package, reasoning in accordance with which is definitive of rationality. The proposed conception shares with the perfection-

ist conception the view that there is a realm of norms which sets an ideal standard for us; this realm is something which, we acknowledge, it would be good to know about in its entirety. But the conception shares with the cut-down versions the recognition that our actual achievements must fall far short of that. Its two-element structure thus allows it to acknowledge some truth in each of these earlier ideas while accepting neither of them. What is central to it is the conception of rationality as an onward moving capacity and not as a particular level of achievement. We now need to consider how this account of rationality removes at least some pressures to eliminativism.

The one-element conceptions of rationality make particular empirical demands which we can see to be falsified by discoveries about human finitude and evolution. On the perfectionist account, rationality demands completeness and consistency which in turn require infinite complexity of behaviour of the kind which finite beings clearly cannot exhibit. On the cut-down account of rationality, which sees it as a finite but still definite package of norms enforcing conformity with itself, empirical problems arise because we can see no place to insert the definite package in the train of explanatory happenings. On the two-element conception these sources of empirical tension disappear. The first disappears because we abandon perfectionist demands. The second disappears because there is no longer a particular place in the explanatory stream where any specific norm or package needs insertion, nor yet any definite package to be inserted.

But is there still some other source of incompatibility between the nature of the world as revealed by the empirical studies of the natural sciences and the nature of the world required if rationality in the two-element sense is to be truly attributable to us? We need to consider possible remaining sources of unease.

The second element of the two-element conception is uncontroversial. It says only that persons have particular inferential outlooks, in the sense of particular complex dispositions to behaviour and to transitions between candidate intentional states. No empirical investigations, whether at the level of neurophysiology, evolutionary or social psychology, could possibly falsify this claim. All that such investigations can do is fill in the details of the patterns to be discerned in the candidate intentional states. The fact that the patterns will often exhibit errors and limitations, from the point of view of some understandings of the norms, is itself no threat to the two-element conception, since that conception explicitly allows that any individual's inferential outlook at a time will be imperfect, incomplete and idiosyncratic.

So if there is pressure to eliminativism, it will be centred on the first element, the one which credits us with grasp of the general notion of better and worse in thinking. It is crucial to resisting eliminativism that we should be able to hold on to this first element. The postulated grasp of the general notion is, so to speak, the point of contact between us and the norms. If we do exercise real grasp of the general notion when we deal with particular

questions (about what follows from what, whether this really justifies that, etc.), then we can each be seen as exercising real ability to become aware of the norms. Thus, we can be seen as arriving, bit by bit, at some knowledge of what the norms require of us. It is thus this first element which, through allowing us this point of contact with the norms, makes it proper to take our candidate intentional states to be real intentional states, because it allows that their formation does manifest our responsiveness to norms. As remarked above, on the two-element view there is no definite package of norms to be inserted to play a role at some definite point in the explanatory story. The norms impress themselves on us, but it is a different set of norms, and in a different order, and spread out over time in a different pattern, for each culture and each individual.

But could we be wrong in taking it that we grasp the general notion of better and worse in thinking and that this grasp is exercised in moving from less good to better inferential outlooks? It is, I suggest, difficult to say 'no' on the basis of any clear cut empirical argument, because the empirical commitment of this idea is so extremely thin. If we take a backward-looking perspective, the commitment is only to the possibility of reading the past histories of ourselves and others as manifesting grasp of the general notion of better and worse in thinking, as our responding to the force of reasons. More important is the forward-looking commitment, which is to its being sensible for us to carry on with the practice of discussing reasons. This forward-looking commitment is more important because if it can be defended, then so can the backward-looking one. If, here and now, I can rightly treat you as someone who may engage effectively in the practice of debating about reasons then there is a presumption in favour of taking you to have had the same capacity in the past and hence a presumption in favour of seeing your past history as manifesting (in some parts at least) growing awareness of some part of the realm of norms.

So let us concentrate on the forward-looking commitment. Could it be in error? In other words, could empirical discovery show that the practice of discussing issues of better and worse in thinking ought to be abandoned? We can certainly imagine science fiction scenarios on which one person discovers empirically that she cannot carry on the practice because some brain illness has reduced every human being except her to a state of automatism or idiocy. But this is not the interesting scenario. The interesting issue is whether, such disasters aside, empirical discoveries made in the neurosciences, evolutionary biology, social psychology or whatever might show the practice to be foolish. This, however, seems an incoherent idea. All that particular such discoveries can do is provide more information about the detailed contours, current strengths or limitations, and neural underpinnings of our actual current inferential outlooks. They cannot discredit the whole practice of asking after reasons. Indeed, they will themselves emerge in a context in which the practice, in the form of discussions among scientists as to whether this or that theory is best supported, is being vigorously carried on.<sup>12</sup>

It may seem, however, that natural science offers us a world view which, taken as a whole, poses a threat to the practice of discussion of reasons, or rather to our ability to take at face value what we do when we engage in it. There is pressure to reason as follows. The general picture of the world already available to us as a result of the progress of science shows us that what we are is immensely elaborate neurophysiological assemblages, which have come into existence as the result of the workings of natural selection. Therefore, none of us really satisfies the two-level conception. We may not be able to envisage any way of carrying on in which we abandon (what we describe as) the practice of discussing reasons with each other. But we cannot reflectively endorse the conception of those activities as our exercise of our capacity to discover more of the realm of norms. We must think of ourselves as packages of matter going through developments, the complete explanation of which lies at the molecular, genetic or theory of evolution level and therefore can have nothing to do with norms. The idea of ourselves as norm-responsive is an illusion, which may be practically unavoidable but is still to be, in some way, repudiated.

This is not the place to discuss the general issues which this argument raises. It is clear that its force is bound up with the complex and controversial questions (about reductive naturalism, supervenience, kinds of explanations and explananda – and also about the notions of truth and fact) which were mentioned in section 1. But we should note that there are very general Wittgensteinian lines of thought which stand opposed to the conclusion the argument tries to enforce. The Wittgensteinian holds that we have a variety of practices of engaging with and talking about the world, both scientific and non-scientific, and we should recognise that they are all, in their own way, practices in which we discover truths. This is not to say that the world is a mere mush upon which we impose a structure, since to think that way is to surrender to a quite unacceptable form of idealism. But respect for objectivity does not require us to conceive of the properties of the world as exhausted by those discovered in natural science. Perhaps the world has more aspects available for appreciation by beings who approach it with the right sensitivities. Perhaps we ourselves can rightly be seen both as complex evolved neurophysiological organisms and as creatures responsive to norms. And perhaps, as our practices of enquiring after norms develop and change, we ourselves also develop and change and so transform ourselves into beings with further sensitivities, to whom yet more of the realm of norms is accessible.<sup>13</sup>

Of course, these possibilities have not here been given serious defence. What I do hope to have made plausible is the claim that, since the two-element conception of rationality is the right articulation of what we mean when we take ourselves to be rational, then it is with these possibilities that we must grapple in order to resolve the issues about eliminativism. There may seem to be quicker and less controversial ways of establishing eliminativism on the basis of a link of rationality with intentionality, namely

the ways explored in the earlier sections of the chapter. But they depend upon a misunderstanding of the role which psychological notions play in our lives and on the related one-level misconstruals of rationality to which those misunderstandings give rise.

### Notes

- 1 The term 'eliminative materialism', later shortened to 'eliminativism', was introduced by Churchland in his provocative writings and he is one of the prime exponents of an empirically based eliminativism (see Churchland 1981). Discussion particularly relevant to his approach can be found in the collection edited by Greenwood (1991) and in a special issue of the journal *Mind and Language* 1993. There is a recent lively discussion by Stich (1996) which also provides an introduction to the literature. Some think that Wittgenstein himself should be lined up with the eliminativists, although the eliminativism he is taken to expound is based on a priori considerations (Kripke 1982, Wright 1986, 1997). The assumption of this chapter is that the reading of Wittgenstein as a meaning sceptic, or meaning eliminativist, is not accurate, but we shall not pursue the exegetical issue here. Many have attacked this reading of Wittgenstein and I have outlined my doubts about it elsewhere (see Heal 1989).
- 2 This line of thought takes off from ideas presented in the earlier writings of Dennett (1979, 1987a). Dennett would now repudiate the label 'eliminativist' and has consistently tried to distance himself from the instrumentalism, and hence eliminativism, which many have seen in his writings. He has written voluminously on these and related issues and this chapter is not presented as an adequate discussion of his views. Rather, it develops one line of thought which may be based on his reflections, and a possible response to it.
- 3 We will call upon different sets of concepts and make different kinds of moves, depending upon what stance we take up. There is thus some resemblance between the idea of a stance and the idea of a Wittgensteinian language game. One way of putting the central suggestion of this chapter is that when we look more closely at what we actually do with psychological concepts, we shall see that there is much which is important to them which is not captured by the idea of taking the intentional stance in order to generate predictions.
- 4 Newcomb's paradox concerns a situation where a person is faced with a choice between two boxes, one of which is open and can be seen to contain £100 and the other of which is closed. She is told that there is already either nothing or £1,000 in the closed box and that she may take either both boxes or only the closed box. She is also told that her choice has been predicted by a superpredicter, which has similarly predicted many other people faced with the same choice and that on all previous occasions when the person took both boxes the closed one proved to be empty while when only the closed box was taken it proved to have £1,000 in it. There seem to be compelling arguments in favour of taking both boxes (after all, either the £1,000 is already there or not and £1,100 is better than £1,000 as £100 is better than nothing) and also in favour of taking only the closed box (previous persons who reasoned in the greedy way got only £100). For more about the paradox, and a way in to the literature about it, see Nozick 1995.
- 5 This is not a satisfactory position in the long run. Significant divergences between the rational and the physical appear when we reflect further. Thus, if we do not know physical laws, we can gain clues to them from observing actual behaviour. But we cannot similarly gain clues to unknown portions of the de-

mands of rationality by observing our own behaviour. The position here, at least in some cases, appears to be the other way round, namely that when we do not know what rationality requires, we do not conform to the demands of rationality, but when we do know, then we do conform. So thinking about what we ought to do can make a significant difference to what we in fact do. By contrast, we do not have any tendency to conform more accurately to the laws of physics in virtue of being aware of them. The story I shall tell later, from section 5 onwards, easily accommodates these obvious but nevertheless interesting points. They are less easy to fit in on the approach that we are now considering, since doing so would mean fine tuning predictive strategies to differences in outlook about rationality in those predicted, thus dissolving the one unified 'intentional stance' into a multiplicity of different predictive strategies. For the moment we shall ignore these issues.

- 6 See Dennett 1991.
- 7 Dennett (1987b: 94ff) makes moves in this direction.
- 8 This proposal is derived, with some modifications, from the excellent discussion by Cherniak (1986).
- 9 It is here that an explanatory role for norms is built into the story we are telling. Section 7 will consider whether the story thereby becomes vulnerable to eliminativist pressure.
- 10 This was what was imagined on the first, highly idealised, conception of rationality considered in section 2. But from the perspective we are now developing, that earlier conception can be seen as the result of conflating possession of a capacity to acquire information of a certain kind with the state which would be the outcome of a total and perfect exercise of the capacity.
- 11 The matters touched on in this paragraph relate to familiar issues concerning the morals to be drawn from Moore's paradox and a whole related slew of questions concerning psychological concepts and first person authority. For some discussion and references to relevant literature, see Heal 1994.
- 12 For related arguments to the practical indispensability of an assumption of rationality, but from a more first personal point of view, see Heal 1999.
- 13 There are links here with themes pursued by McDowell (1998a). See, in particular, Essay 9 'Two Sorts of Naturalism'. McDowell is there talking about ethics, but his issue and ours cannot be disentangled. We have so far been concentrating mainly on better and worse in thinking in connection with theoretical reasoning and with issues like what sort of grip we can credit ourselves with on what follows from what. But, as remarked earlier, theoretical reflection is a practical activity. It takes time and resources of energy and attention which, given that we have only finite supplies of them, might be better devoted to other activities. There is no considering good and bad in thinking without considering good and bad more generally and it would be wrong to suppose that progress in thinking was always a matter of acquiring more insight of a narrowly logical character. But these points raise issues which we cannot pursue here.

# UNDERSTANDING SCEPTICISM

## Wittgenstein's paradoxical reinterpretation of sceptical doubt

*Andrea Kern*

With Wittgenstein originates the idea that philosophical problems are a sort of ‘muddle’ that we fall into when we reflect upon ourselves in certain ways.<sup>1</sup> In the course of such a reflection we, for example, make the ostensible discovery that it is impossible in principle for us to have knowledge of the external world or of the inner states of other subjects. Our mistake here, according to Wittgenstein, is not that we have come upon a false theory of the subject matter of our enquiry. Rather, we are caught in a confusion which springs from the form of our reflection whose character is not transparent to us. Wittgenstein therefore responds to the problems raised by scepticism not with a philosophical theory which would solve these problems. He rather offers a ‘therapy’ which is meant to free us from being exercised by them.<sup>2</sup>

Philosophy is therapy, not theory. This does not imply that either Wittgenstein himself or the present-day philosophers who in his wake advocate a therapeutic method in philosophy, abandon positive conceptions of knowledge. Yet it does suggest that we will understand the point of such conceptions only by attending to the therapeutic function they are intended to fulfil. We must not conceive of them as theories of knowledge which do or do not give a convincing answer to sceptical problems. Rather, their content consists in the way in which they attempt to liberate us from the persistent inclination to seek such an answer in the first place. It is unclear, however, what form a Wittgensteinian therapy of scepticism ought to assume. I think one can distinguish at least two conceptions of philosophical therapy. The first one is exemplified in the writings of, for example, John McDowell, Cora Diamond and Marie McGinn. According to this conception, a philosophical therapy seeks to *dissolve* scepticism: it attempts to show that the sceptic’s doubt is intelligible only in the light of philosophical preconceptions which are by no means unavoidable.<sup>3</sup> In challenging these preconceptions, it recommends to the sceptic a point of view from which her doubt no longer makes sense. The second conception is exemplified most notably in the work of Stanley Cavell. According to it, a philosophical therapy performs

an operation that is properly *paradoxical*: it seeks to overcome doubt, not by dissolving, but by affirming it. However, as it affirms the sceptic's doubt, it reinterprets its meaning. Its goal, then, is not to show the sceptic that her doubt is meaningless, but that it has a meaning *different* from the one she herself ascribes to it. The sceptic's doubt contains an incontestable truth, one the sceptic herself, however, cannot comprehend.

In this chapter, I shall argue that a philosophical therapy must take the form of a paradoxical reinterpretation of the sceptic's problem. As long as the philosophical therapy is driven by the aim of dissolving the problem raised by scepticism, it cannot prevent itself from getting re-entangled in the very problem it wanted to eliminate.

The reading of Wittgenstein which sees him as offering not a refutation, but a therapy of scepticism, is not uncontested. According to an influential interpretation, Wittgenstein's notion of a criterion provides the means for rebutting sceptical doubt. Hence, in section 1, I shall first expound this allegedly Wittgensteinian anti-sceptic theory. In section 2 I then present the dissolving therapy as a critique of this anti-sceptical reading of Wittgenstein. I go on, in section 3, to show that the dissolving therapy fails. The sceptic's doubt must be affirmed, but understood differently. On the basis of this revised understanding, I offer in section 4 an account of how the sceptic is led to misinterpret her own doubt. I end with suggesting that scepticism is a possibility internal to the enterprise of philosophy (section 5).

## 1 Philosophy as theory

Sceptics are concerned with the question of how we can be certain that our judgements about the world or other subjects are actually true, and thus can constitute knowledge. In the following, I will concentrate on the sceptic about other minds. Much of what I shall say, however, as I hope will be easy to see, is relevant, *mutatis mutandis*, to the problem raised by scepticism about the external world as well.

The Wittgensteinian anti-sceptic claims to refute scepticism about other minds by appeal to a certain notion of a criterion. The sceptical problem he takes himself to have solved can be exposed as follows:

It is clear how I know that I myself am in pain. I know it because I feel my pain. My pain is given to me in experience. But how do I know that another person is in pain? I do not feel her pain. Her pain is not given to me in experience. I must *infer* that she is in pain from something which is distinct from, but indicates her pain. I infer that she is in pain from the way she behaves. Her behaviour indicates that she is in pain. However, it may well be that she behaves as if she were in pain, but is not. Hence, I cannot, from her behaviour, conclude with certainty that she is in pain. It follows that I am never able to know whether

another person is in pain. All I ever experience of another subject is her behaviour, and the way she behaves is only contingently connected to what I want to know, namely whether she is in pain. Nothing of what is available to me in experience (her screaming and groaning, her contorted features, her crying or calling upon me for help) affords me a secure basis for the judgement that she is actually in pain.

The anti-sceptic<sup>4</sup> to whom the dissolving therapy responds claims that we indeed possess the kind of knowledge which according to the sceptic we cannot possess. He sets out to show that and how we are able to attain knowledge of inner states to which we have no access in experience. We are able to know that another person is in pain, he argues, because it may be that the behaviour of a person not only indicates that she is in pain, but satisfies the *criteria* for her being in pain. A kind of bodily comportment is a criterion for pain if and only if such comportment *defines* the meaning of the concept of pain. It is then part of what it means to be in pain that this state shows itself in behaviour of such and such a sort. The anti-sceptic claims that there must be behavioural criteria for the existence of inner states in this sense, because if there were not, judgements concerning inner states of other subjects would have no content. A certain kind of behaviour, if it is a criterion for an inner state, is linked to this state not contingently, but, in a term of Wittgenstein's, grammatically. The connection between a criterion and the state for which it is a criterion is a priori, and not empirical. And from this, the anti-sceptic believes, there follows an *epistemological consequence*: when the behaviour exhibited by a person satisfies the criteria for pain, we have a secure epistemic basis for judging that she is in pain. We can, on the basis of the satisfaction of behavioural criteria, know that she is in the corresponding inner state.

Of course, our judgements about the inner states of other subjects can be wrong. We can be wrong even if our judgement is grounded in the satisfaction of criteria, because criterial relations are essentially 'defeasible' (Baker 1974: 161–2). One reason why they are defeasible is that they can be feigned.<sup>5</sup> When someone feigns pain, criteria are satisfied, but no pain exists. In general, someone's bodily comportment satisfying the criteria for the existence of a certain inner state guarantees that the state exists, only if the behaviour has an *expressive* character, i.e. is an expression of this state. If it is not, the criterial evidence is defeated. Now, whereas it is epistemically unproblematic to obtain knowledge as to whether a criterion is satisfied or not, it is inherently problematic to obtain knowledge as to whether it has an expressive character. We cannot exclude beyond doubt that someone, for example, is feigning pain and that therefore her behaviour does not have an expressive character (Baker 1974: 162). After all, there can be no criteria which distinguish real pain from feigned pain. If there were, an actor could feign them.<sup>6</sup> Hence, according to the anti-sceptic, criterial relations are structurally defeasible, despite their a priori character.

The notion of a criterion as it is developed in the anti-sceptic theory is the notion of a relation of a kind of behaviour to a kind of inner state which is both a priori and defeasible. The anti-sceptic claims that scepticism is false, because inner states have outer criteria in this sense. As external behaviour and inner state are linked a priori, we can know about the state on the basis of behaviour.<sup>7</sup> Since the link is defeasible, we nevertheless can sometimes be in error.

The anti-sceptic claims to find in Wittgenstein a notion of a criterion which supplies a refutation of the sceptic's doubt. He refers to citations such as these: 'Grammar tells what kind of object anything is' (PI 373), 'Essence is expressed by grammar' (PI 371) or 'An "inner process" stands in need of outward criteria' (PI 580). But it is just this anti-sceptical interpretation of the notion of a criterion that therapists think represents a fatal misreading of Wittgenstein.

## 2 Therapy as the dissolution of sceptical doubt

Therapy for philosophy comes into play when it is realised that the anti-sceptic's answer to the sceptic does not so much solve the problem as reiterate it. The anti-sceptic claims that I can know that another person is in pain on the grounds that her behaviour satisfies the corresponding criteria. However, given that criteria are in principle defeasible, this seems to be straightforwardly false. In order to know, I must be able to rule out the possibility of error. The epistemic basis of my judgement must be such as to rule out this possibility. But even when someone's behaviour satisfies the criteria for pain, it still remains possible that she is not in pain. It remains possible, for example, that she feigns pain, and there is no information available to me which would enable me to rule out this possibility. Since criterial evidence is in principle defeasible, even if I know that criteria are satisfied I am left in an epistemic position wherein I cannot rule out that the other person is not in pain. And this means that I do not know that she is in pain.<sup>8</sup>

The anti-sceptic, in his attempt to explain how our judgements may sometimes be in error, falls back into the sceptical predicament. It turns out that criteria do not better our epistemic situation. Given that they are defeasible, it is of no consequence epistemologically that they are *a priori*.<sup>9</sup>

The guiding idea of the dissolving therapy is the following. The anti-sceptic is unable to refute the sceptic effectively because he shares with the sceptic a fundamental premise: our epistemic relation to other subjects is a relation to two spheres which are logically distinct from one another. The outer sphere is the domain of the body and its comportment; to it we have direct epistemic access. The inner sphere is the realm of thoughts, feelings, and sensations. Our access to this sphere is *mediated*: a person's bodily comportment informs us of what is going on 'inside' her. Hence, for anti-sceptic and sceptic alike,

we gain access to someone else's inner states in two steps. In the first step, we apply predicates that refer only to the outer sphere. On that basis we then, in a second step, apply predicates referring to the inner sphere.

Dissolving therapists identify precisely this two-step model of our relation to other subjects as the real root of scepticism. In their view, the idea responsible for scepticism is not the idea that the use of predicates referring to the body furnishes an uncertain basis for the use of predicates referring to an inner state; rather, it is the idea that our use of psychological predicates is *based upon* the use we make of bodily predicates which, for their part, are *logically independent* of them. In the light of this idea, our fundamental epistemic relation to other subjects is conceived as a relation not to a *human being*, but to a *human body*. We refer to another subject fundamentally through concepts of the body. Only then do we come upon the question of what might be going on in her soul and in her mind. Yet this conception, McDowell argues, is by no means 'compulsory' (McDowell 1998b: 385). It is the result of a conceptual *displacement* in the philosophical description of our experience of other subjects. The sceptic and the anti-sceptic remove the concept of a human being from its 'focal position' and put in its place a concept of a human body devised by philosophy (McDowell 1998b: 384). They then attempt to clarify the concept of a human being in terms of this philosophical artifice, albeit with a predictable lack of success.

According to the diagnosis of the dissolving therapist, anti-sceptics and sceptics have fallen victim to a philosophical confusion. They fail to consider our relation to others from the point of view of a *participant* in a human community, and consider it instead from the viewpoint of a cosmic *observer*. They take on what McDowell calls a 'sideways-on view' or a view 'from outside'.<sup>10</sup> Only from this view-point does the concept of a human being appear to be a philosophical riddle; only thence would we first chance upon others as bodies about which we need ask what justifies our applying predicates to them that pertain to their inner states. Sceptics and anti-sceptics do not simply advocate a false thesis about the nature of our knowledge of other subjects. They assume a false *perspective on our knowledge*.

If scepticism is the expression of a false perspective upon our relations to one another, a therapy of scepticism must above all understand how one can be tempted to such a perspective. We can liberate ourselves from a temptation only if we understand its ground. McDowell believes the temptation of the viewpoint of the cosmic observer results from certain historical and social forces such as the scientism characteristic of our intellectual climate.<sup>11</sup> These forces, McDowell believes, can exert power only so long as we have no convincing philosophical articulation of the participant's perspective. His therapy, then, consists in spelling out a conception of our knowledge of others which is implicit in the perspective of a participant in a human community. The conception is therapeutic in the sense explained above: It is not a self-standing theory of knowledge which can be considered apart from its thera-

peutic intention. Rather, its content resides in how it renders unattractive the distorting perspective upon ourselves which leads to scepticism.

When we articulate the perspective of a participant, we are, according to the dissolving therapist, leading to the following conception of our knowledge of others: the experiential basis for a judgement that someone is in pain is not a behaviour we comprehend through concepts pertaining solely to the body. Rather, human behaviour is marked *from the start* by its expressive character. When we judge that someone's behaviour satisfies the criteria for pain we do not classify her behaviour in a way which leaves it open whether it is in fact expressive of pain – this was the anti-sceptic's view; rather, we classify her behaviour as pain behaviour, and thereby recognise it as an *expression* of pain. The behavioural criteria for pain, then, are satisfied if and only if the behaviour in question is expressive of pain.

This entails a *disjunctive* conception of the experiential basis of judgements about someone's being in pain: correct and incorrect judgements do not have the same basis in experience. If the judgement is correct, then the evidence given in experience consists in the fact that the criterion for pain is satisfied – she is expressing pain. If the judgement is incorrect, it consists in the fact that the criterion only appears to be satisfied – it only looks as though she is expressing pain, but in fact she is not.

When we accept this conception of our knowledge of others, sceptical doubt is no longer intelligible. It can be framed only as long as we adhere to the idea that someone's inner life is not given in experience, and hence, must be inferred from behaviour. The dissolving therapist advances a conception according to which someone else's inner states are not beyond my experience and thus available to me only indirectly. As Wittgenstein writes with regard to someone being in fear:

It is possible to say 'I read timidity in his face' but at all events the timidity does not seem to be merely associated, outwardly connected, with the face; but fear is there, alive, in the features. If the features change slightly, we can speak of a change in the fear.

(PI 537)

The features in his face are not indications of his fear, but the fear itself is visible to us, it is 'alive' in the features. The content of my experience of another person and the content of my judgement concerning the inner state of this person are one and the same: that *such and such is the case* regarding him; that he is, for example, in fear.<sup>12</sup> In this way, behavioural criteria tell us, and indeed indefeasibly, that such and such an inner state exists.

It is a consequence of this understanding of criteria that I cannot be more certain that the criteria of a certain inner state are satisfied than I am that a corresponding inner state exists. I cannot be certain of the experiential basis of the judgement that someone is in pain without being certain of that

judgement itself. The observation that another person is expressing pain and the judgement that she is in pain are not logically independent of each other. I can be certain of the observation's validity only as I am certain of the judgement's validity, and vice versa. We might say that the basis for my judgement concerning another person's pain and that judgement itself form a hermeneutic circle.<sup>13</sup>

The sceptic considers our relation to other subjects from the point of view of a cosmic observer. We now see that this conception of our epistemic relation to others goes with a certain conception of the certainty which must attach to judgements if they are to constitute knowledge. The sceptic requires that a judgement concerning someone's inner states be justified by an experience whose content is logically independent of those states. The therapist dismisses this conception of certainty: the conception of certainty as *a guarantee from without*. Criteria provide us with certainty of a kind that does not rest upon a basis external to the judgement itself; its certainty is not warranted from without. The epistemic basis of our judgement is expressed through predicates that already refer to an inner state, and not through predicates that do not contain the idea of an inner state.

### 3 Therapy as a paradoxical reinterpretation of sceptical doubt

The dissolving therapist observes that the anti-sceptic's conception of criteria, far from refuting sceptical doubt, only reiterates it. Now, as we shall see, the dissolving therapist's conception of our experience of inner states as manifested in behaviour, far from dissolving scepticism, only reinstates the sceptical disquiet. In its treatment of the sceptic's doubt who seeks to establish the *certainty* of her judgements, the disjunctive conception of experience, Cavell claims, achieves nothing. For, according to Cavell, this conception:

can preserve the certainty of the connection between a criterion and what it is a criterion of only at the price of never knowing with certainty that the criterion is satisfied, that what it is *of* is *there* [ . . . ] If I claim that X is the case on the basis of the presence of the criteria of X and 'it turns out' that X is not the case, then I can always say, 'The criteria were only seemingly present,' or 'The criteria were only seemingly satisfied'. That something is a criterion of X is now – to appeal to an old thought – necessary because analytic, and therefore empirically empty.

(Cavell 1979: 41–2)

The disjunctive conception of experience must to the sceptic seem a failure. It appears not to respond to her problem *at all*. The disjunctive conception can explain why criteria are able to provide us with certainty concerning the

inner states of other subjects only by simultaneously leaving the question unresolved of how we can be certain that a criterion is given to us in experience. We have no way of knowing whether the situation is such that the criteria for pain are satisfied, or whether it is such that they only appear to be satisfied. But of course, it does not matter where the uncertainty enters: in our inferring from the satisfaction of a criterion that our judgement is true, or in our initial identifying of the criterion itself. The therapy does not resolve the epistemological problem, but rather relocates it.<sup>14</sup>

The moral that Cavell draws from the failure of the disjunctive conception is that the point of philosophical therapy cannot consist in a *dissolution* of sceptical doubt; rather, its point will have to consist in bringing us to a *proper understanding* of that doubt. 'A formidable criticism of scepticism,' Cavell writes, 'will have to discover and alter its understanding of itself' (Cavell 1979: 38). The therapy, according to this understanding of it, requires a paradoxical reinterpretation of sceptical doubt. Whereas the dissolving therapy aims at leading the sceptic to a conception of our knowledge wherein her doubt no longer has a place, the reinterpreting therapy aims to lead her to a conception of our knowledge that *disarms* her doubt precisely by *affirming* it. In affirming it, however, the therapist reinterprets the content of the sceptic's discovery: the groundlessness of our judgements about the inner states of others does not show that our epistemic faculties are limited, but rather reveals that our fundamental relation to other subjects is not epistemic.

The dissolving therapist identifies a premise shared by sceptic and anti-sceptic. It is the premise that judgements about the inner states of someone else must have an epistemic basis which is logically independent of the judgement based upon it. The reinterpreting therapist, in turn, identifies a premise shared by the dissolving therapist and the anti-sceptic. It is the premise that our judgements about the inner states of someone else stand in need of an epistemic basis, and that the satisfaction of criteria affords such a basis. The anti-sceptic and the dissolving therapist agree in the view that bodily criteria are constitutive of the content of corresponding concepts of inner states. And they take it that criteria in virtue of playing this *transcendental* role also play an *epistemic* role. Criteria confer content on concepts of inner states and in doing so they provide an epistemic basis for judgements about the existence of these states. According to Cavell, it is precisely this idea, the idea that criteria are 'the means by which the existence of something is established with certainty – in perhaps the most famous case, that the criteria of pain [...] are the means by which we can know with certainty that another is in pain,' which is the real root of the sceptic's doubt, or more specifically, of the disquiet that moves her (Cavell 1979: 6–7).

Criteria confer content on judgements about inner states of others, but they do not provide an epistemic basis for judgements about these states. In order to see that this is so, reconsider the case where criteria for pain are feigned, as happens, for instance, on stage. How do we describe an actor who,

having been struck by a rapier in a duel on stage, collapses and whimpers or cries out? It is beyond question that the actor is feigning pain. According to Cavell, it is precisely this that we comprehend on the basis of the criteria for pain. The criteria we have for pain enable us to describe this scene as one in which pain (as the case may be) is being feigned. That we have to use the concept of pain whenever pain is merely feigned in order to say *what* it is that someone is feigning, shows wherein the content of criteria has to consist: criteria for pain guide the application of the concept of pain, be it in the context ‘pretends to be in . . .’ or in the context ‘is in . . .’. Criteria do not allow us to attain certainty that someone else does not merely *feign* pain, but actually *is in* pain. They allow us to identify what it is that someone is feigning or actually experiencing as *pain*, and not, say, sorrow or rage. Cavell writes:

Criteria are ‘criteria for something’s being so,’ not in the sense that they tell us of a thing’s existence, but of something like its identity, not of its *being* so, but of its being *so*. Criteria do not determine the certainty of statements, but the application of the concepts employed in statements.

(Cavell 1979: 45)

Behavioural criteria are constitutive of the content of judgements about inner states, not in that they allow us to know that some inner state *exists*, but in that they enable us to *identify* it properly. We can be deceived as to the existence of an inner state, not because criteria are defeasible, as the anti-sceptic believes, nor because they may appear to be satisfied when in fact they are not, as the dissolving therapist believes. We can be deceived because criteria have nothing at all to say about whether an inner state exists or not. When someone pretends pain, the criteria for pain not only *appear* to be satisfied. They *are* satisfied. Compare the case of pretending with a case where we are not certain whether the person is expressing pain, or whether she is clearing her throat. In this sort of situation, we are not certain whether the concept of pain applies; whereas in a situation in which someone is pretending pain the concept unquestionably applies. In the first case we do not know whether it is pain which is at issue, but this is quite certain in the case of someone who is feigning it. When someone is pretending pain, she gives us the criterion for using the concept of pain; and it is only because we know that it is pain that is at issue that we can raise the question whether she is feigning it.

The sceptic claims that knowing that someone is in pain requires that we have an epistemic basis in experience which guarantees the existence of pain. She discovers that behaviour cannot afford such a basis. The anti-sceptic and the dissolving therapist, on the contrary, claim that behaviour can afford such a basis, since it may satisfy grammatical criteria; criteria provide an epistemic basis for our judgements concerning someone’s inner states. The reinterpreting therapist disagrees with this understanding of criteria.

He claims that criteria for pain are criteria for the use of the concept of pain, but do not guarantee the existence of pain. They do not afford an epistemic basis for judgements of existence. He thus affirms the sceptic's claim that there is no epistemic basis in experience which guarantees the existence of pain.

The reinterpreting therapist affirms that we cannot know that someone else is in pain in the sense that there is no basis in experience which would guarantee the existence of pain. However, as interpreted by the therapist, this discovery takes on a different meaning. Its new meaning develops from a reflection on the being of criteria. It is clear that there must be criteria for the use of psychological concepts if our judgements about the inner states of others are to have content. But what does it mean to say that there are criteria that determine the use of our concepts? According to the reinterpreting therapist, that there are criteria for using a certain concept means that there is a practice of using this concept in judgements. Wittgenstein makes this point when he says that our judgements about the inner states of others have content in virtue of our being 'master of a technique' and thus in virtue of our being a participant in an accustomed use of psychological concepts (for instance, the concept of pain) (PI 199). We have mastered the use of a certain concept – we are familiar with its use – as we participate in a 'custom' or, as I would prefer to say, a *practice*.

Our judgements about pain have content in virtue of being phenomena of a practice of making such judgements. This practice, however, is not just a practice of judging that pain exists. It is essentially a practice of responding to the pain of others. This is obvious when we consider how we learn the use of the concept of pain. We learn not simply to perceive that someone is expressing pain. More fundamentally, we learn to *respond to* someone expressing pain. We learn, for example, that someone in pain needs help or care. We learn to feel pity for her, to console her, to give her medication, to call for a doctor, etc. We learn to use the concept of pain in learning how to respond to someone expressing pain. The phenomena of the practice of using the concept of pain comprise *responsive pain behaviour* as well as *expressive pain behaviour*. The pain behaviour constitutive of the content of judgements about pain is of two forms: behaviour on the side of the one being in pain and behaviour on the side of the one judging about the pain, i.e. behaviour expressive of pain and behaviour responsive to pain.

The capacity to use the concept of pain, then, is essentially a capacity to respond practically to the pain of another. Our practical response to someone else is the original mode in which we know that she is in pain. In its basic appearance, a judgement that someone is in pain is implicit in the taking of such a practical attitude towards the other. Independently of a practice of responding to someone in pain, the idea that someone is in pain makes no sense.

There are criteria for pain because and insofar as there is a practice of using the concept of pain. And the fundamental phenomena of this practice

are cases where recognition of criteria takes on the form of behaviour responsive to pain and where satisfaction of criteria is behaviour expressive of pain. For conceiving of someone as *being* in pain is *responding* to her as to someone in pain, while conceiving of someone as pretending pain is *withholding one's response* to her. And someone can be said to withhold only a response of which she is capable. Equally, in order to be able to pretend pain, one must have experienced pain. And the human experience of pain includes behaviour expressing one's pain in ways to which others can respond. 'A child', Wittgenstein writes, 'must have developed far before it can pretend, must have learned a law of truth before it can simulate' (LW 2 42). Hence, the cases where recognition of criteria is responsive pain behaviour and satisfaction of criteria is expressive pain behaviour are fundamental in that without them there would be no practice of using the concept of pain, and, thus, no criteria of its use. It is through these cases that an understanding of the concept of pain is acquired and maintained. They are the normal cases, not in the sense that they are frequent statistically speaking (although they may be that, too), but in the sense that they are the cases with which someone who has mastered the practice is familiar.

The normal cases are fundamental; without them, there would be no concept of pain.<sup>15</sup> And in these cases – in the normal cases of using the concept of pain – there is no step from identifying a state as pain to claiming that it actually exists. When, in such a case, one claims that some inner state exists, one does not take a step *beyond* the initial identification of this state. Such a claim is already inherent in the normal cases of the use of the corresponding concept.<sup>16</sup> As we see what it is for there to be criteria for the use of concepts, we arrive at a conception of our knowledge which dislodges the idea that our relation to other subjects is epistemic: the capacity to know about the inner states of other subjects turns out to be a capacity primarily exercised in the taking of a practical attitude towards them. Knowing is responding.

Given this conception of knowledge, we are now in a position to reinterpret the sceptic's discovery. That criteria for pain are satisfied, I have argued, does not establish the existence of pain. It only establishes the identity of a state, pretended or real, as pain. Hence, the sceptic is right in holding that there is no behaviour which would guarantee the existence of pain. However, this implies that we can never know whether someone is in pain only if it is always necessary to take a step from identifying a state as pain to claiming that it exists. But we have seen that there are criteria for the identity of a state as pain only because there is a practice of using the concept of pain. And the fundamental phenomena of this practice, its normal cases, are such that there is no room for such a step. It follows that there is no epistemic grounding of our judgements about pain. However, this does not mean that something of the kind the sceptic is seeking is absent. To say that criteria are only criteria for identifying the inner state of another subject and not for knowing its existence is to argue that claiming its existence is not something

we do *in addition* to identifying it. There is no epistemic grounding of our judgements about the existence of pain because there is *no step* to be taken from the identification of pain to its existence. As we understand what it is for there to be criteria for the identity of a state as pain, we see that being able to identify such a state cannot be dissociated from being able to know that someone is in pain.

We now see where the sceptic's basic misunderstanding lies. It lies in the way in which she conceives of the impossibility of being certain of someone's pain on the basis of her behaviour. She thinks that it expresses an incapacity of our epistemic faculties – that it has the character of an *epistemic failure*. But we cannot 'know' whether an inner state we have identified on the basis of criteria actually exists or not; not in the sense that we are condemned to fail epistemically in our relations to such states, but in the sense that our relation to other subjects' inner states is not an *epistemic* one at all.<sup>17</sup> Since a case of knowing that someone is in pain is, fundamentally, a case of responding to someone in pain, our knowledge of the inner states of other subjects cannot be founded upon an epistemic basis. We cannot 'know' whether an inner state exists or not. But this does not represent a contentful discovery regarding the reach of our knowledge. It is expressive of the fact that knowing, in normal cases, is responding.

#### 4 The reason for scepticism

I have argued that the reinterpreting therapist pursues the paradoxical strategy of stripping sceptical doubt of its power precisely by showing that it is right: the sceptic is right when she discovers that we can never be 'certain' of the pain of other people. But this discovery does not express a surprising truth about the reach of our epistemic capacities, as the sceptic thinks. That there is no epistemic grounding of our judgements about the existence of the inner states of others does not mean that there is something that fails to be grounded, but rather, that there is nothing to be grounded. Our judgements cannot be grounded because being able to use psychological concepts *at all* means being familiar with normal cases of their use, where there is no step from identifying a state to claiming that it actually exists, and therefore no gap between what is directly given in experience, namely the behaviour, and the inner state of the other. In normal cases, our behaviour responsive to pain does not rest upon evidence which answers the question: is the other actually in pain? Rather, it is itself the answer to this question.

According to this diagnosis, the sceptic's doubt results from a *misunderstanding* of the truth she discovers. It is by no means a fabrication, but she misunderstands it. But what is the reason for this misunderstanding? Why does she think that knowing the inner states of others requires us to bridge a gap between what is directly given in our experience and what we actually want to know; namely, whether the other is really in pain?

Consider a situation of doubt. A little boy is lying in his bed and crying for help. He tells his mother that he feels sick; that his stomach, his head and just about everything else hurts. He winces and cries and tells her that he cannot get up. However, there is something the mother finds strange in his behaviour this morning. His face is neither pale nor red, his wincing sounds somehow forced, not like it normally sounds when he is in pain. And he is talking so much about his pain, something he also normally doesn't do when he is in pain – almost as if he wanted to convince the mother of his pain. The mother becomes suspicious. Maybe he is only pretending pain because he does not want to go to school today? Isn't there a maths test scheduled for today? The mother *withholds* her response to the boy.

In such a case of doubt, we do not respond 'blindly' to the other,<sup>18</sup> but we are confronted with the question whether the pain-behaviour of the other does have an expressive character or not. Hence, a case of doubt is one in which we see our relation to the other as being marked by a *gap* between that which we experience, namely his pain behaviour, and the fact we wish to know, namely whether he really is in pain.

What will the mother do in such a case? She will look for criteria for pain. In a case of doubt, we bring in criteria. But given that criteria are only criteria for the identity of an inner state, and not of its existence, how can we characterise the function of our appeal to criteria in such a case? It cannot be that we are appealing to criteria in order to establish a *basis* from which we can securely infer that the other is in pain. In appealing to criteria, we are not appealing to something that would allow us to make an inference to bridge the gap between the behaviour of the little boy and his inner state. We are rather looking for something that will make the gap *disappear*. Criteria enter in a case of doubt not as a basis for an inferred judgement but in an attempt to relate to the scene as a scene of expression, and thus as a scene where no inference is needed. We are looking for something that helps us to see that the situation – despite its first appearance – is normal. In other words, we are looking for something that will *restore* our familiarity with the situation.

Now, imagine the same case of doubt, but abstract from the fact that there is a practice of using the concept of pain. If there is no such practice, our appeal to criteria cannot have the function of restoring our familiarity with the situation. For that we are familiar with a situation in which someone is expressing pain means that it is the sort of situation which constitutes the fundamental phenomena of this practice. So if there is no practice, there is no familiarity to restore. The role of criteria now can only be to provide an epistemic basis for an inferred judgement that the other really is pain. If we abstract from the practice of using the concept of pain, we can only understand our appeal to criteria as an appeal to an epistemic basis for our judgement. However, if we understand our appeal to criteria as an appeal to evidence, we cannot avoid the discovery that criteria necessarily *fail* to provide such an epistemic basis. Any criterion for pain the mother might

appeal to will be such that it may be satisfied and it still be the case that her boy is not in pain.

When we abstract from the fact that there is a practice of using the concept of pain, we abstract from the fact that there are normal cases of using this concept: cases with which we are familiar. We can call this the sceptic's condition: the sceptic is taking a point of view on our knowledge of others in which there are *no normal cases*. From this point of view, there does not seem to be any such thing as a normal case, and thus for the sceptic every case is a case of doubt: one in which a gap appears between the behaviour of the other and the inner state which we actually wish to know. One could also say: the sceptic investigates the case of doubt as if it were the normal case. As we have seen, the fact that the sceptic takes the case of doubt to be the normal case – which means that she does not have the concept of a normal case – has a decisive consequence: she cannot conceive of our knowledge of others as being anything other than a result of having bridged the gap between the behaviour of the other and her inner state. The absence of a notion of a practice leads the sceptic to *epistemologise* our knowledge of others.<sup>19</sup> She cannot avoid conceiving of our knowledge that the other is in pain as being based on an inference from what is given in experience to something which lies behind.

The diagnosis of the sceptic's condition, then, runs as follows: having in her enquiry substituted for the normal case the case of doubt, and not being aware of this substitution, she cannot avoid misunderstanding the real significance of criteria. She cannot help but think that their role is to make our knowledge about others possible by providing the basis for an inference that, as she rightly insists, we can never be justified in drawing.

The sceptic's conception of knowledge as the result of an inference which bridges the gap between what is given in experience and the inner state of another is not simply a prejudice that could be philosophically challenged. It is rather the expression of a denial: a denial of the very practice in virtue of which her concepts do have content, and hence a denial of that which allows her to say anything at all.

## 5 Philosophy and scepticism

The failure of the dissolving therapy, I have suggested, has its ground in the fact that it, too, operates with the premise that constitutes the real root of scepticism, namely, that our fundamental relation to others is an epistemic one. By way of a conclusion, I would like to claim that the reason for this presupposition is an inadequate understanding of the nature of the point of view we take when we engage in philosophical reflection.

The dissolving therapist believes that the sceptic's confusion consists in her attempt to comprehend our relation to other subjects from the vantage point of an observer, instead of placing herself in the position of a participant and clarifying it from within. However, the dissolving therapist conceives of

our tenacious inclination to take the observer's vantage point as resulting from historical and sociopsychological, that is to say, extraphilosophical forces. That scepticism is a contingent fact of the philosophical tradition, as the dissolving therapist has it, implies that philosophical clarification is something which can be carried out *without* taking the vantage point of an observer.

However, I would like to claim that philosophical clarification can only begin in so far as one has taken the observer's vantage point. If this is right, then sceptical doubt does not represent an accidental confusion within the philosophical tradition, but rather has its occasion in the nature of philosophy itself.<sup>20</sup> It is the philosophical perspective *as such* that suggests the idea to us that our knowledge concerning others requires an epistemic basis.

Why is this so? Why does it contradict the idea of philosophical reflection to hold that the participant's position could be clarified without our having to take the perspective of an observer? The reason, according to Cavell, is that philosophy, were it not to assume that vantage point, would have nothing to focus on at all. For then the very idea of specific judgemental practices, whose possibility we can enquire into and which we can seek to clarify, would be unavailable to us. In other words, it is precisely from the observer's vantage point that we are first able to bring the position of the participant into view as such; and it is thus that *every* philosophical reflection is first provided with its object. The idea that *there is* a practice of judgement with a specific form represents the beginning of any philosophical enquiry. Without relating to ourselves as subjects who do not merely judge in this or that way, but *have* a practice of making judgements, one in which, for instance, inner states are ascribed to other subjects, no properly philosophical reflection upon the form of our knowledge of those states could commence at all.

But why are we able to identify and classify such practices from the observer's vantage point alone? It is a fundamental characteristic of practices that a practice exists at all only in so far as we are familiar with it. But if practices have their being in their being familiar, this means that we can identify them *as such* only when we remove or distance ourselves from them. Or better: to *identify* as such something that is familiar to us means giving up our familiarity with it, leaving it behind or beginning to find it strange. Identifying and classifying something that has been familiar to us, and the increasing strangeness of what was familiar about it, are two sides of the same process. One already must have lost quite a bit of one's familiarity with some practice if one is to be at all able to identify it as such; yet at the same time it is precisely this identification that accentuates the estrangement from it requisite for identifying it in the first place. The idea of a particular practice of making judgements, such that one can ask philosophically how that practice is possible, necessarily assumes that one is not involved *in* it, but has stepped back from it. Hence, the question whether in our philosophical reflection we have to assume either the participant's

position or the observer's vantage-point is beside the point. *That* we start to reflect philosophically means that we have already assumed the latter point of view.

This explains why everything might appear to be in question in the sceptical light of the philosophical perspective. For, from the very start, this perspective is one in which we have *broken off* our familiar relationship with the world and other people, such that they might appear to us as *strange*. Philosophy has the tendency to cast a disruptive glance at the world; in its view, it seems as though the world and other people have to be, as Cavell puts it, 'regained every day, in repetition, regained as gone' (Cavell 1988: 172). The philosophical perspective itself, not only some feature of it, is such that in taking it we already set one foot on the road to scepticism. As Cavell writes, 'Wittgenstein's claim is that philosophy causes us to lose ourselves and that philosophy is philosophy's therapy' (Cavell 1979: 34).

Of course, this does not mean that philosophical reflection will necessarily end up in scepticism. Philosophy is only a necessary condition for scepticism, not a sufficient one. However, it does mean that the perspective of philosophy as such will tend to instill sceptical doubt in us, which will seem inescapable to the extent that we fail to understand and take into account the peculiar character of this perspective. It is not the mere *taking* of an observer's vantage point that leads philosophical reflection into sceptical doubt, as dissolving therapists rashly claim, but rather an inadequate conception of that viewpoint. One becomes a sceptic irrevocably when one conceives of philosophical reflection as explaining the possibility of our practices without making use of the idea of our being familiar with these practices, hence with our being familiar with its normal cases.<sup>21</sup> One is then not aware of the fact that philosophical reflection itself is the very *reason* for the absence of this familiarity, and hence the reason for the very problem that we try without success to solve in the course of our enquiry. It is precisely when one fails to comprehend this that one will understand the point of the criteria we appeal to in cases of doubt to be epistemic; they will then seem to furnish an epistemic basis upon which our knowledge that another is in pain is founded.

In her philosophical enquiry, the sceptic not only steps back from our practice of making judgements in order to obtain a reflective understanding of that practice, but does so unaware of what she is doing. She is blind to the fact that her philosophical reflection on our practice precisely begins with such a withdrawal from our practice. From this blindness towards the character of her reflection, it follows that the sceptic is forced to deny the very knowledge she cannot help but have: the very knowledge that is implicit in her practically responding to the world and other people (Cavell 1979: 104 and 109). By deceiving herself about our relation to the world and other people in this way, the sceptic is deceiving herself about one thing above all: herself (Cavell 1979: 179–80, 207, 222).

The sceptic therefore cannot be freed from her doubt simply by being shown that she is caught in a ‘muddle.’ She is not merely drawing a false conclusion from a confused premise. Rather, she is denying something that she cannot help but have. One can say neither that this denial is necessary nor that it is arbitrary; it is a denial linked to the nature of philosophical reflection itself.

Therefore, the therapy that Wittgenstein devises for the sceptic will not relieve her of all doubt, but will get her to see the denial upon which her doubt rests. Comprehending this denial does not render the sceptic’s doubt meaningless but gives it a different meaning – perhaps one she can live with.<sup>22</sup>

### Notes

- 1 PI 153. Concerning the idea of confusion, see also, *inter alia*, PI 16, 38, 132, 149, and 693.
- 2 See PI 133, 255.
- 3 See, for example, McDowell 1994 (especially pp. 175–80), 1998a Chs. 11–12, 1998b Ch. 17, Diamond 1991 Introduction 2, Chs. 1, 7 and 9; and McGinn 1989 and 1998.
- 4 I am referring to the position shared by authors like Rogers Albritton, Norman Malcolm, Gordon Baker and Crispin Wright, to mention only those who are particularly important in the present context. See Albritton 1966; Baker 1974; Malcolm 1968; and Wright 1982.
- 5 Another reason for the defeasibility of criterial evidence is the fact that criterial relations are context-dependent. See, for example, Baker 1974: 162 and Malcolm 1968: 85.
- 6 Compare Davidson’s reflections upon Frege’s assertion sign in ‘Moods and Performances,’ p. 113, in Davidson 1984.
- 7 Thus, Baker 1974: 163. See also Malcolm 1968: 84: ‘The satisfaction of the criteria of  $y$  establishes the existence of  $y$  beyond question.’
- 8 For this objection see, for example, John McDowell, ‘Criteria, Defeasibility, and Knowledge’, p. 372 (in McDowell 1998b).
- 9 See Cavell 1979: 41. Dieter Birnbacher, who interprets the concept of criteria in the manner of the anti-sceptics, attempts to evade the predicament that then results with this formulation: ‘So the justification conferred by evidential criteria is a precarious one; it does not furnish a logical guarantee. Any single constellation of the supporting evidence is fallible and can in principle be destroyed by other pieces of evidence which might be produced at some future time . . . . Evidential criteria guarantee not an objective certainty (in the sense of infallibility) but an objectively justified claim to certainty in practice, which may be fallible but . . . is justified and acknowledged.’ (Birnbacher 1982: 64) But this description, too, means that I can be entirely justified in believing that  $x$  exists even though it could well be the case that  $x$  does not actually exist.
- 10 See McDowell 1994: 34–6, 41–2, 81–2, 168.
- 11 See, for example, McDowell 1994 (pp. 70ff), ‘Two Sorts of Naturalism’ (pp. 174ff) and ‘Aesthetic Value, Objectivity, and the Fabric of the World’ (pp. 128f) (both in McDowell 1998a).
- 12 See McDowell 1998b: 385.
- 13 I am using the idea of a hermeneutic circle in the sense in which Hans-Georg Gadamer has developed it, in Gadamer 1986 (1960]: 270–95.

14 A similar criticism of McDowell's conception is also made in Glendinning 1998: 138 ff. I have discussed McDowell's position in greater detail in Kern 2000a. There, I argue that McDowell's failure stems from his having fused together two different modes of arguing, which, though they do point in the same direction, cannot simply be combined. His strategy is the incoherent attempt to carry through a Wittgensteinian therapy for philosophy by means of Kantian transcendental reflection.

15 For the notion of a 'normal case', see, for example, PI 141, 142; and John Austin, 'Other Minds,' p. 113 in Austin 1961.

16 See, for example, Cavell 1979: 51.

17 Cavell puts this point as follows: 'Wittgenstein's appeal to criteria, though it takes its importance from the problem of scepticism, is not, and is not meant to be, a refutation of scepticism. Not at least, in the form we had thought a refutation must take. That is, it does not negate the concluding thesis of scepticism, that we do not know with certainty of the existence of the external world (or of other minds). On the contrary, Wittgenstein, as I read him, rather affirms that thesis, or rather takes it as *undeniable*, and so shifts its weight. What the thesis now means is something like: our relation to the world as a whole, or to others in general, is not one of knowing, where knowing construes itself as being certain. So it is also true that we do not *fail* to know such things.' (1979: 45).

18 As Wittgenstein describes our capacity to master the use of a concept in PI 219.

19 To say that the sceptic epistemologises our knowledge is not to say that she wrongly assumes an epistemic relation to certain 'propositions' that make no epistemic claim, as Marie McGinn argues. McGinn argues that Wittgenstein dissolves scepticism's problem by showing that the sceptic assumes an epistemic relation to certain propositions that do not in fact make any epistemic claims but rather embody techniques for describing the world (techniques which we can only master in practice). I take this to mean the following: every judgement constituting knowledge contains not only epistemic elements, that is, convictions that make epistemic claims, and which we, for our part, are able to justify, but also non-epistemic elements, convictions of a sort Marie McGinn calls 'framework propositions,' to which we have no epistemic relation at all. The function of these propositions is to render explicit the presuppositions that make the judgement possible in the first place, presuppositions we become aware of only in practice, when we act, and never with the help of reflection alone. When I say that the sceptic epistemologises our knowledge, this means something else: it implies not that our knowledge of others or of the world contains a non-epistemic element, so-called presuppositions that *ground* our knowledge, but that our knowledge, e.g. of the existence of another's inner state, does not have any ground at all. There are no presuppositions that ground our knowledge that the other is in pain because in normal cases there is no step to be taken from the identification of pain to its existence. This distinction explains why she believes that Wittgenstein's therapy for philosophy consists in dissolving the sceptic's doubt. See McGinn 1989; and also, more specifically with regard to her understanding of the concept of therapy, McGinn 1997, especially pp. 23, 27 and 143–76. With regard to scepticism about other minds, see McGinn 1998 esp. pp. 51f.

20 For that, see, for example, Cavell's essay, 'The Uncanniness of the Ordinary,' pp. 170–4, in Cavell 1988.

21 That the criticism of this sceptical conception of philosophy has, at the very least, its roots in Kant's critical philosophy, I argue in Kern 2000b. There I suggest that the significance of Kant's criticism of scepticism can be understood only when one sees that it also corrects the sceptical conception of philosophy's task.

22 Translated from German by Jack Ben-Levi.

# LIVING WITH THE PROBLEM OF THE OTHER

Wittgenstein, Cavell and other minds scepticism

*Edward Minar*

## 1 Cavellian themes

Stanley Cavell is one of Wittgenstein's major readers, in part because he has shown how to read Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* as unified around the task of responding to (while not refuting) scepticism in its various forms and guises. In Part IV of *The Claim of Reason*, Cavell attempts to explain why the other minds sceptic is less successful than the sceptic about our knowledge of the external world in producing a sense that our everyday beliefs (whatever exactly they amount to) are less well founded than we normally take them to be. Cavell thinks that the other minds sceptic's efforts nevertheless shed light on important features of our lives with others, including the way that the so-called common sense of the matter is to be conceived. Cavell's thought in this realm is, like Wittgenstein's, systematically elusive. There is imminent danger in trying to fix on a definite structuring of his argument as a whole. There are, on the other hand, advantages to be gained in trying to delineate the major aspects of Cavell's treatment as explicitly as possible, not the least of which lies in not allowing the rigour in his words to be obscured by the impression they make.

Something more about the demands made by Cavell's writing is worth adding at the outset. As Arnold Davidson has said, 'Cavell writes not primarily to produce new theses or conclusions, nor to produce new arguments to old conclusions, but, as Kierkegaard and the later Wittgenstein did, to excavate and transform the reader's sensibility' (Davidson 1989: 234). This kind of transformation is to be effected by descriptions of the philosophical position or outlook or (as Cavell will say) mood that is being addressed. Timothy Gould, elaborating on Davidson, points out that 'a way of writing that aims to transform a reader's sensibility must seek out readers who are at least partly willing and ready to have their sensibilities transformed' (Gould 1998: 34).<sup>1</sup> What does this seeking out have to do in order to engage the reader? Efforts

to transform a sensibility are liable to meet with resistance, and describing a philosophical sensibility by exploring its origins, motivations, and attractions is bound on some occasions to strike the sensibility being diagnosed as irrelevant. How will Cavell's writing, then, 'give . . . his philosophical readers enough material to keep them coming back for more?' (Gould 1998: 35) What in his response to other minds scepticism in particular will reach the philosophical reader who is dubious about the need for a turning of his or her sensibilities? There is no way to approach these questions but to work carefully through the details of Cavell's response to scepticism in order to scrutinise at each moment whether and how it captures – accurately describes, and maintains the attention of – our philosophical (we might even say sceptical) sensibilities concerning other minds. In this chapter, I will attempt to clarify and develop three major themes emerging from Cavell's treatment of other minds scepticism. In reconstructing these themes, I aim to deepen our sense of their relations, to advance some considerations on their behalf, to bring the issues they raise into sharp focus, and to allow them to begin to work on our philosophical sensibilities.

The first theme can be labelled 'the failure of scepticism'. Cavell follows Wittgenstein in re-enacting the sceptic's attempts to problematise our beliefs about others, only to find that the sceptic's radical questioning does not really get off the ground, at least not in a shape that reflects the sceptic's self-understanding. I shall defend this conclusion by criticising one, very abstract, sceptical argument that relies on little more than the logical independence of facts about behaviour and facts about minds, and then by trying to turn back some unsuccessful attempts to shore up this unconvincing argument through the introduction of ostensibly more particular reasons for doubting our beliefs about others.

Examining why the other minds sceptic cannot raise a general doubt about the mindedness of others leads to the recognition of what Cavell calls a 'truth of scepticism' (Cavell 1979: 241) – my second theme. I want to explain and render plausible the idea that the sceptic's efforts point, despite his failure, to something significant about our relations to others. In speaking of a truth of scepticism, Cavell is often taken, naturally enough, to mean that scepticism is more or less true. Marie McGinn, for example, writes:

We begin to approach the truth in scepticism, Cavell believes, when we see that I am forced to acknowledge that my judgements about others are surrounded by uncertainty, for whatever faith I have in the humanity of the other it is, in some important sense, at best mine; my judgements are less than certain because they have their roots in me, in my unreasoned identification with – or trust in – the other.

(McGinn 1998: 48)<sup>2</sup>

This is a definite misreading. Cavell is far from acquiescing in a sceptical conclusion. The truth of scepticism – the truth, that is, that scepticism makes available to us – is that ‘our relation to the world as a whole, or to others in general, is not one of knowing, where knowing construes itself as being certain’ (Cavell 1979: 45). ‘The human creature’s basis in the world as a whole, its relation to the world as such, is not that of knowing, anyway not what we think of as knowing’ (*ibid.*: 45).<sup>3</sup> This truth shifts away from the sceptic’s preferred self-interpretation, which is (Cavell says) ‘that we do not know with certainty of the existence of the external world (or of other minds)’ (*ibid.*: 45). True, we cannot be said to know with certainty of the existence of the world or of other minds, but ‘it is also true that we do not *fail* to know such things’ (*ibid.*: 45). To see Cavell as accepting, in some fashion, the sceptic’s doubts is to read him through sceptical lenses. It is to take for granted what he wants to contest, that the sceptic’s conceptions of belief, evidence, certainty, and knowledge are directly applicable to our basic relations to the world and to others in general.

After we have worked through the failure and the truth of scepticism, it will come as a further revelation, Cavell thinks, that ‘(some dimension of) our lives with others, some frames of mind in which we view others, are to be characterised as sceptical, or rather, understood in terms forced upon us, or made available to us, in thinking through scepticism’ (*ibid.*: 448). This idea, that our lives may well *be* tinged with scepticism, makes up my third theme, which I want to motivate (in part by showing its connection to the other two). Cavell explores this theme under the provocative rubric ‘living our scepticism’.<sup>4</sup> Living our scepticism is not to be confused with the truth of scepticism.<sup>5</sup> The latter renders something that is supposed to be ‘undeniable’ (Cavell 1979: 45) and inevitable in the human condition; it comprises a conceptual or grammatical necessity. The former is a ‘surmise’ (Cavell 1988: 127) or ‘intuition’ (Cavell 1979: 448) which represents, by contrast, a particular, historical, contingent way we have of realising our condition. To put it differently, the *real* problem of the other here becomes an *existential* problem, an issue of our self-understanding and its embodiment in our lives. To view the problem as a mere theoretical puzzle about our cognitive powers, as the sceptic is prone to do, amounts to an avoidance and an intellectualisation of our actual predicament, which lies in our attitudes towards and responses to others (and, of course, theirs to us). I am myself responsible for my responsiveness to others, and this is a responsibility I may not always bear. In so far as I fail to live up to my responsibility, I may be said to live my scepticism, even to allow myself to do so. Cavell’s writing charts the enigmatic and disturbing prospect that for the most part we *do* so fail, that we *do* live our scepticism with respect to other minds. It is here, naturally, that we begin to see most patently the connection that Cavell has long wanted to draw between scepticism and tragedy; scepticism is, one might say, a rationalised expression of a kind of deafness to the human world. Its attractions manifest

our openness and vulnerability to the fear that others may on some occasions be blank to us and we to them.

## 2 The contours of other minds scepticism

What do we know about what other people think, feel, and experience? In the mouth of a sceptical philosopher, this question stands at the beginning of a radical exercise in self-criticism that calls for either a general explanation of how it is possible for us to know *anything* about others or a grudging admission that we don't, not really. That it raises a demand for an account of the very possibility of knowledge may in the long run raise suspicions about whether the sceptic's investigation is the illegitimate outgrowth of a surreptitious metaphysical construction of the relation between the inner and the outer. At the outset, however, we *seem* to understand his concerns without excessive theoretical prompting, they seem natural and important enough. Understanding what is radical in the sceptic's enterprise will help to fix some ideas that prove critical to evaluating his progress.

The sceptic's challenge is, first of all, *global*. The general character of his doubt – the feature that makes us want to label it distinctively philosophical – is notoriously hard to characterise, but it seems safe to say that it is connected to the aforementioned idea of a suitably general explanation of the possibility of knowledge in a given area.<sup>6</sup> Such an explanation would, by making no use of any beliefs about that area, presume nothing about our accomplishments in it, and so would show not only how, but *that*, knowledge with respect to this domain is possible. The sceptic is not interested in showing on a case by case basis that we are less certain or more prone to error about all the particulars than we tend to think. Instead he reveals, if his doubts are genuine and if they generalise from his preferred cases in the way he anticipates, that we lack any basis for a whole class of beliefs. He questions, for example, whether behaviour gives us *any* reason for believing *anything* about other minds. On the sceptic's view, then, we have no access to facts about an entire aspect of human experience, no idea of the actual layout of a, for all we know, wholly fantastical realm. Our loss is somehow more than a diminishment of the information about the world we have at our disposal; the picture of our condition with which the sceptic leaves us is one not of chronic intellectual carelessness, but, rather, of perpetual cognitive confinement. Our sloppiness about what we should believe, whatever its extent, is a fact of life that we can hope, if not exactly to rectify, to manage. The sceptic, on the other hand, takes himself to discover something both earthshaking and irremediable about our unreflective confidence in our ability to acquire any well-founded beliefs in the first place.

Its capacity to deliver a shock is dependent on a second, and crucial, feature of scepticism – its *dialectical* character. The sceptic, if he is to dislodge common sense, must start from within, employing only beliefs, commitments

and principles that we recognise as our own. Not only the sceptic's vaunted intellectual scrupulousness but, more importantly, his very claim to rationality require that he employs standards and procedures that are implicit in our everyday practices of assessing our beliefs. After all, if his standards came from a particular theory of knowledge with no plausible claim to represent our everyday proceedings, the sceptic could be accused of changing the subject by setting the standard of knowledge too high or by imposing standards appropriate to one domain as the measure of our successes in another. His 'shock' would then be at best a reason for rejecting an analysis of knowledge that led to an unacceptable conclusion, not a threat to our access to the world of his, and our, concern. Scepticism is gripping; it makes a respectable claim on our attention, because it starts from where we are.

Now, it is also true that at the end of his dialectical progress, taking himself to have undermined the viability of the ordinary standards and procedures he has employed, the sceptic typically wants to offer a sort of *consolation* in exchange for his theoretical victory. Reason shows that we don't know, but we can reconcile ourselves to our failure by noting that we return to our natural beliefs when we leave our studies. Alternately, a dream-world of appearances sensuously indistinguishable from the real one could, for all *practical* purposes, be treated as if real. Or so the sceptic, now in a conciliatory mood, may propose.

Here Cavell sees an important asymmetry: the conclusion of other minds scepticism delivers less of a surprise than its counterpart in the material object case. Unreflective common sense on the matter of others does not begin with quite the same confidence in our capacities. We are not as prone to begin by taking it that we have a G.E. Moore-type certainty about a wide array of supposedly paradigmatic individual cases. *Before* other minds scepticism can work its philosophical mischief, we are already prepared for disappointment. Our everyday attitudes, having already comprehended the most natural of the doubts on which other minds scepticism trades for its plausibility, are cushioned against the rude awakening with which scepticism was to greet them. When we consider the question of our knowledge of others, rather than proceeding fairly quickly to something disturbing about our theoretical credentials, we remain focused on the felt reality of *particular* doubts about *particular* others. At this level, further, our doubts are both as real and as practical as can be; they are accordingly harder to accommodate or ignore as the product of a merely abstract and theoretical enquiry. In the long run, the apparent ease with which we are sometimes willing to say on reflection, 'OK, so I can't really *know* what anyone else is thinking,' comes to strike Cavell as anything but the aftermath of a dispassionate assessment of common sense. Rather, the persistence of a sceptical outlook in the realm of other minds, its insistence, our willingness to remain open to it, all will indicate a definite orientation *within* the world of our everyday concerns.

### 3 The failure of scepticism: the ‘gap argument’

Suppose that beliefs about subject matter A are thought to be justified by (independently and purportedly better justified) beliefs about subject matter B, so that beliefs about B are ultimately to provide whatever rational basis we have for beliefs about A. The sceptic entertains a very broad question: are beliefs about A *adequately* supported by beliefs about B?<sup>7</sup> Now let ‘A’ stand for other minds and ‘B’ for behaviour. Behaviour, widely construed to include non-verbal noises such as crying and laughing, gestures, facial expressions, physical movements (shrinking back in fear), physical appearances (a cut, tearing) and verbal expressions or reports, seems to be what we go on when we make judgements about others. It is *prima facie* plausible to suppose that all manifestations of behaviour can exist independently of any particular mental items they might be thought to evidence, and that an individual mental item might find a range of different manifestations, if any. Further, it may seem, any sort of behavioural manifestation can be known or recognised independently of a definite commitment to the existence of any particular mental items. In this sense, beliefs about behaviour can be said to be epistemically prior to beliefs about other minds. It may now seem to be a short step to the conclusion that we could have complete knowledge of someone’s behaviour without having any knowledge of what is going on in his or her mind. Given the epistemic priority of behaviour and its logical independence from the mental items that it is supposed to evidence, the sceptic’s question seems apposite: does behaviour supply us with a good enough basis for our beliefs about other minds, including our very commitment to their existence? Is the logical gap between behaviour and mind epistemically significant, and if so, can it be bridged? Can we get past someone’s behaviour to his or her inner life?

The other minds sceptic is puzzled to find no obvious way to answer these questions. His story is familiar. ‘Bridge principles’ that would license transitions from behaviour to mental states involve the correlation of items from both categories. To provide empirical support for such principles, either I must have some prior knowledge of other minds (in the form of ‘certain types of beliefs about behaviour provide good evidence for certain types of beliefs about other minds’), or I must turn to my own case and extrapolate from whatever experiential correlations between mental states and behaviour it supplies. In the former case, obviously, I have not genuinely bridged the gap, but have helped myself to some of the knowledge I am trying to justify. In the latter, it is notoriously unclear what licenses the contention that my own case provides an adequate empirical basis on which to generalise about others. Nor does an *a priori* justification of our bridge principles, which would in effect treat them as meaning postulates, seem viable. To point, for example, to a range of behaviours as paradigmatic of what we call ‘pain’ (*This* is what we mean by “pain”) appears wrongheaded. As long as the significance of the

simple facts the sceptic deploys in setting up his division of our beliefs into the independent domains of behaviour and mind – that any behaviour can be exhibited in the absence of any particular underlying mental state, and that any particular mental state might have all kinds of behavioural expressions, or none – remains unchallenged, he will take himself to have ample reason to reject such an appeal to meaning. In particular, he will think that the presence of the behavioural criteria taken to be definitive of pain leaves open the question of whether *the pain itself* is really there; perhaps, after all, the other is just pretending to be in pain, for all I know.<sup>8</sup> The sceptic seems to bank on little besides our willingness to admit that there is more to other minds than behaviour, more to particular mental states than the behaviour normally taken to be expressive of them. To deny that a doubt about how we can know about others arises at this point, the sceptic feels, amounts either to a dogmatic assertion that insists on minds as the only possible explanation of the behavioural phenomena or to a behaviourist reduction that relinquishes the genuine and substantial presence of minds in the world. As the matter stands, the inner seems to be intrinsically cloaked by bodily expression.

The sceptic's problem has been constructed so that we could have complete knowledge of the behaviour of others without having any knowledge of their minds. On the other hand, the terms of the problem dictate that any knowledge that would license inferences beyond behaviour to other minds would presuppose some of the knowledge we are trying to justify. It is not altogether surprising that, under these conditions, the sceptic has proved difficult to answer. The sceptic's set-up is, however, less innocuous than it appears. It involves substantive and questionable assumptions. In particular, its presumption of the coherence and epistemic importance of a sharp divide between beliefs about other minds and beliefs about behaviour demands careful scrutiny.

Of course it is a commonplace that any particular behaviour could occur in the absence of the mental condition with which it is typically associated. The significance of such possibilities is less clear. The sceptic thinks of mental states as lying *behind* behaviour, as opposed to being embodied *in* it. Consider a smile or a wince. It is much more natural to say that we see bemusement in someone's smile and that we see pain in that wince than to say that we infer bemusement from the smile or pain from the wince. The ways in which we talk about behaviour are infused with the idea that in many circumstances, we see people in the relevant states of mind. We recognise, sort and classify kinds of behaviour with reference to the kinds of mental states of which they are expressive. As Wittgenstein points out (PI 285), when we see a piece of behaviour as a smile, we are doing more than picking out and labelling a category of geometrical configurations appearing against a oval background.

Without a doubt, the sceptic's idea of 'behind' reflects an extremely important facet of our lives with others – that people can and will keep themselves hidden. Moreover, there are circumstances in which we say that

behaviour does manifest something hidden inside, but these moments are very particular. Sometimes, for example, our words or looks *betray* a hidden emotion or belief, whatever efforts at concealment (conscious or unconscious) we may have made. The conditions in which we may be hiding something are not exceptional. One might well wonder, however, why they should serve as paradigms for our knowledge of other minds. In any case, understanding the variety of ways in which behaviour may fail to connect up with what is hidden deep within someone involves substantial familiarity with other minds. Knowing our way about in this domain draws on an appreciation of the various vicissitudes of successful self-expression and of our considerable resources for self-concealment. Grasping the possibilities requires genuine psychological insight.

Neither the logical independence of mental states and instances of behaviour nor the picture of mind as lying behind behaviour adequately motivates the idea of an epistemologically significant gap between these domains. To put the point more bluntly, the question of whether the sceptic has advanced a completely general question about the possibility of knowledge of other minds is begged if, as begins to seem to be the case, a metaphysically loaded picture of mind and behaviour as hermetically sealed realms has been smuggled in from the outset. I hope it is clear that pointing to the interdependence of different realms here is not meant to demonstrate the existence of other minds. Nor is the reference to what we say meant to establish the falsity of the sceptic's picture. Both of these appeals, rather, are meant to get us to scrutinise whether, given that the basis that we do have for particular claims about minds (physical damage, winces, groans, utterances) is only grasped against a backdrop which takes access to both realms for granted, there is any genuine perspective from which to raise a prior question about our reasons for taking there to be minds. They are meant to highlight the dialectical stakes: The sceptic must motivate his demand for such general reasons, explain for what he is looking. He should be required to do so without first importing an unsupported view of mental states as hidden, inner objects.

If the sceptic's employment of the independence of behaviour and mind has been rendered questionable, so has his demand that we justify taking behaviour to provide adequate evidence for the mental condition of others. A particular wince may not be a certain indication of pain, and behavioural expressions may be ambiguous or illegible in untold ways. In any given case, deception or misinterpretation will be conceivable. To say that it is therefore always doubtful whether another is enjoying a particular mental state is clearly to overgeneralise. Does the possibility of error or doubt in circumstances similar to my present ones imply that *right now* I have no idea what is going on in *that* other person's mind? Only, it seems clear, in certain contexts, where I am groping in the dark with respect to that other. The sceptical picture, we might say, portrays our relations to particular others as beginning in unfamiliarity, in isolation from any sociable background. Consider

your mother or your significant other or your best friend. Can those tears or shrugs of the shoulders (let alone *all* those words) really be connected to a mind in the most unanticipated of ways or not at all? What would an affirmative answer show? Even if a person's expressions are phony, *this* phoniness involves the other in a very particular relation to us and is indicative of some underlying quality of mind. In our anxiety about the genuineness of his or her gestures, we are already relating ourselves in a quite specific way to a mind, a human being. We find ourselves in a relation which is, however vexed or unravelled, quite unlike our relation to a cauliflower or a moss (as Sartre might say<sup>9</sup>).

Let us review where we are. To take behaviour as a separable domain from that which it expresses – mind – is to make a metaphysical assumption, the epistemological significance of which has so far been supported only by the sceptic's assertion that all the facts about behaviour can be completely known independently of any knowledge of minds.<sup>10</sup> This assertion is at odds with the idea that the behaviour we actually go on cannot be characterised or brought into focus without a commitment to the existence of minds. For the sceptic's purposes, it must be, but has not been, shown that there is a behavioural substratum, characterisable as a merely physical, potentially inexpressive, residue, that provides the only possible source of *real* evidence for other minds. I am not denying, nor do I take Cavell or Wittgenstein to need to deny, that it may be possible for some purposes to separate bodily behaviour as sheer physicality from mind or from acting or from 'meaningful' behaviour. Nor am I saying that if we were to make this separation and, further, grant that bodily behaviour as physical movement is all we have to go on, we would then face the sort of gap that the sceptic takes to have epistemologically fateful significance. I am questioning whether we should find it inevitable or rational or evident that we should *begin* with a gap of the sort the sceptic finds so salient,<sup>11</sup> and trying to highlight that there ought to be a good question why we find it natural to do so.

Now, again, the fact that we do not generally speaking make sense of behaviour, and therefore of behavioural evidence, and in particular of failures of evidence to support particular claims, without carrying a commitment to the existence of minds does not demonstrate that we *do* know anything about them. Rather, the sceptic has not established a foothold against every claim about minds we take ourselves to have reason to make. On the other hand, the sceptic's progress and its failure *have* suggested, it seems, the futility of seeking evidence or justification for the overarching claim that minds exist. As far as we have seen, the whole idea of evidence or justification in the realm of other minds works in contexts in which the existence of minds is a foregone conclusion, something we hold fast.<sup>12</sup> Another way to put this is to say that behaviour will carry justificatory weight only given a backdrop that takes minds for granted; its status as evidence is underwritten by our more general commitment. Our practice of relying on behaviour for our access to

minds is not, and for all we know need not be, based on some prior knowledge that justifies the practice.

Here we are in the vicinity where Cavell discerns a truth in scepticism: our relation to others in general is not a matter of knowledge. This truth, to repeat, is not what the sceptic thought of himself as demonstrating. It represents no failure on our part, and suggests that our confinement from others, where real, is not the inevitable metaphysical consequence of our limited capacities as knowers.

We may, if we wish, speak here of a framework or background commitment to the existence of minds. Is this framework up for justification? To think so is to treat the commitment as something that, on Cavell's view as well as Wittgenstein's, it is not – an epistemic item about which a single, well-understood justificatory question could be asked. The framework lacks this kind of unity, it has no existence independent of what it is supposed to underwrite. All the commitment to the framework amounts to, that is, is contained in our piecemeal commitments to whatever attitudes and endorsements are expressed in the relevant practices, our ways of responding to others and of expressing our attitudes towards them, our claims about and on them and our routines for assessing and defending these claims. These responses show that and what we believe. Our commitments may, of course, be up for *piecemeal* justification, but there is no framework standing there as a target for wholesale questioning. But what about the practices themselves? Are they candidates for attempts at justification, and if not, do they nevertheless somehow *need* justification? To follow Wittgenstein in declaring 'This is simply what I do' (PI 217) is to maintain otherwise. Is this because the practices are constitutive of our sense of what minds are, inform our attitudes with content? I take it, no: to suppose that there is a constitutive question about what in general makes it possible for our beliefs about minds to have the content they do is already to adopt an external standpoint on the practices, it is in effect to treat the commitment to minds as hypothetical. What lies in our commitment to our practices is not a theoretical stance but rather a willingness to continue to talk (to make sense of others and ourselves) in the particular ways we have at hand, to be responsible to and for *this* manner of speaking.

#### 4 The failure of other minds scepticism: the failure to find a best case

I have questioned the realism of a picture on which the existence of a logical gap between behaviour and mind would lead directly to a sceptical moral. It would be premature to dismiss the sceptic at this juncture, but we can give his investigation a more definite shape. Rather than relying on the gap alone, he needs to bring forward specific reasons for doubt in each case of putative knowledge of other minds or at least show how systematically to generate

such doubts. This is what we should have expected, given the dialectical character of his enquiry. The sceptic seeks, that is, to produce particular considerations that would move us away from our common-sense beliefs about other minds. These reasons would take the form of possibilities which, if actualised, would show that what we take to be going on ‘inside’, behind some instance of behaviour, is not really present. We would lack sufficient reason to discount such possibilities, and, importantly, the resultant doubts would generalise to all cases. Can the sceptic adduce such specific reasons, and will they support his separation of behaviour and mind into independent domains and a consequent suspension of judgement about other minds?

Cavell sets up a schematic dialogue to put the sceptic’s efforts to move from querying ordinary claims to drawing a general sceptical moral on exhibit. The schema, adapted from J.L. Austin, is supposed to model the procedures we use for assessing and defending ordinary assertion. We are to keep in mind that dialectically speaking, the sceptic’s claim to rationality is bound up with his matching those procedures sufficiently well; it is from them that we have gleaned our original sense of what constitutes rationality in the domain in question.

Claim: A.B. is angry.

Request for basis: how do you know?

Basis: From how he is acting, from his behaviour.<sup>13</sup>

Ground for doubt: He might exhibit all these things and not be angry. He might be pretending; you might be misreading his expressions. For all you know, he is feeling something very different, or for that matter nothing.

Conclusion (reached if the ground for doubt cannot be countered): I don’t know.

Moral: I never know. His behaviour is not an adequate basis for my knowledge. After all, behaviour is not feelings; it appears that only he can know that he is angry.<sup>14</sup>

One striking feature of this exchange is this: before I conclude that I do not know anything about others on the basis of a particular case, I will want some indication as to why I have to take a particular ground for doubt seriously. I need to be shown what reason I have to think, on this occasion, here and now, that I might be reading his expressions wrong, or that he might be pretending, or that it might not be anger he is feeling but rather something else. These specific reasons will normally leave me face to face with another mind,

although perhaps one odder and more unfamiliar than I had anticipated. Is the sceptic's claim that everyone turns out to be more of a stranger to me than I had thought? Further, each of my grounds for doubt in a given case will be applicable to *this* person in *this* situation. If he might be pretending, does that show me that you might be pretending as well? You might be; but *his* case does not show this, and so far I am not disposed to think that the mere possibility of pretence means I have no way of finding out. The sceptic's grounds for doubt, once specified, seem not to generalise in the way his sceptical moral demands. He has not yet uncovered a best case – an exemplar where if we know anything, we know this. He needs such a case if he is to speak to the fate of our knowledge of others as a whole.

This rather quick route with the sceptic's argument is likely to prompt the following response: 'After all, he might be pretending. If he is, you don't know. And if you don't know about *him*, even if that doesn't raise an immediate doubt about others, aren't you just being stubborn, resisting a generalisation simply to avoid the inevitable need to confront the sceptic's conclusion head on? Can't we go through a process by which we single out *each* other, one by one, and raise doubts anew about each in turn? It's not as though he's the Great Pretender or something; there's nothing special or peculiar or untypical about his case.' My stubbornness remains. I find myself wanting to say that, in reviewing each case, I will be looking at what my orientation towards each other is to be, what weight I am to allow each other's expressions. At worst, I have something to figure out every time. Where particular doubts involve pretence or mistakes about what an expression is an expression of – say, where it is not anger, but tiredness, that I see in another's face – I continue, with apparent impunity, to operate with a presumption of the other's mindedness and undiminished though hardly unlimited confidence in my own ability to get it right. Unless I can make sense of the dubious idea that *all* behaviour could be pretence or that every reading of an expression might involve a misapprehension of what is expressed, I have no reason to question all my beliefs here. Now, there are certainly exceptional cases in which there really is nothing going on behind what I take to be expressive behaviour, that is, nothing being expressed. I may, for example, take what is just the physical set of a person's jaw to be impatience. Here no particular state of mind enters into the explanation of what is really going on with the other when I erroneously judge him or her to be impatient.<sup>15</sup> Could it *always* be this way? The stubborn reaction still maintains that I make sense of my mistake here through a contrast to a normal range of sincere or natural expressions of inner feelings, that I still have no reason to deploy this possibility against the competence of *all* behavioural evidence.

The suspicion may arise that my still dismissive reaction is a result of starting with *too* everyday a case, with too much knowledge already built into the setting of my doubts. Let us ask what happens if we try to use some more outré possibilities, those involving automata and their ilk, in an effort

to bracket those features of context that already involve minds. Will such scenarios generalise without requiring a case-by-case assessment of my particular relations to each individual in turn? Will they force a re-examination of my presumption that there is mindedness around? Suppose along your daily route you watch as the seemingly perfectly ordinary person walking in front of you, with whom you had just exchanged pleasantries, loses his or her head with a ‘sproing’, revealing a lot of electronics where flesh and blood and bone should have been. (i) Would this tell you anything about how you should have been responding to and treating him or her all along? (ii) Does it tell you anything about how you should respond to and treat everyone else? (iii) Suppose the same kind of thing happens repeatedly; are you going to suspend judgement about all these ‘human’ ‘bodies’ around you and treat everyone with suspicion? What *kind* of suspicion? Will your concerns and interests here be focused on whether you *know*, as opposed to the details of the situation and your means for dealing with your conceptual and practical disorientation?<sup>16</sup>

These questions are not meant to be rhetorical. We may not know how to measure our responses, how to determine what we should say in these circumstances. I am inclined to think that all we are entitled to draw by way of a general conclusion is that we don’t know what to say. Our conceptual resources need not be designed to ensure that we can assess the epistemic significance of extreme sceptical possibilities in isolation from our actual responses to and imaginings of others. How we would or should respond to the prospect of inhabiting a world populated by life-imitating zombies or life-simulating robots ultimately depends on the details. More revealing are cases in which we find whole groups of others opaque. If we were consistently to misread the facial expressions and gestures of the members of a group, we would not be forced to the conclusion that we just could not come to understand them. More time, further and more patient study, greater absorption in their lives, cleverer conceptual innovation, all may contribute to our overcoming our inability to read them. Cavell asks, ‘how much is enough when it comes to knowing and acknowledging the humanity of another?’ (Cavell 1979: 438) At what point, that is, do we read our failings as ‘the recognition of a universal human condition’ (*ibid.*: 438) of ignorance and isolation rather than as a fact about our ways of existing in that condition? It is not an insurmountable shortcoming of our conceptual tools that they do not anticipate determinate and conclusive responses to these questions. Before we draw a sceptical conclusion about our knowledge of and relatedness to others, we had better have a clearer understanding than the sceptic has provided of just what the possibilities and their saliences are.

What we have been noting is the failure of the other minds sceptic’s initial doubts, where real, to generalise in the way they would have to were they legitimately to call for a sweeping, global questioning of our capacities as knowers in the domain of other minds. This failure can be explained as the defeat of our efforts to find a best case of knowledge of the other. The sceptic

needs a best case if its failure to constitute knowledge is to speak to the fate of knowledge of others as a whole. Unfortunately for the sceptic, we lack reason to think that any particular encounter is in this sense representative of our potential as knowers in these matters. As soon as a candidate best case is put forward and called into doubt, its own particularities reveal themselves, and the focus remains on this case, not our overall abilities.<sup>17</sup>

## 5 The truth in scepticism again: attitudes and acknowledgement

Cavell's uncovering of a truth in scepticism – that our relation to others in general is not one of knowing – is meant to effect a shift in how we conceive our stake in the problem of other minds. Our relation to persons in general rests in our capacity to acknowledge them<sup>18</sup> and in what Wittgenstein invites us to call our 'attitude towards a soul' (PI 178). To acknowledge another person is to express a recognition of, an identification with, and an offer of attention or response to him or her. We have been prepared for the crucial shift to acknowledgement and attitude by several moments in our consideration of the sceptic's case: by the suggestion that the sceptic almost seems to posit the exemplary other as a stranger, by the idea that when the other is specified, my orientation towards his or her particular expressions comes to the forefront of my attention, and by questions about the differences the discovery of life-like automata would make to my actual responses to (as well as my theoretical beliefs about) others. Now we can ask: are my special *attitudes* towards others justified – justified, that is, as attitudes towards souls or minds?

Wittgenstein writes, “I believe that he is not an automaton”, just like that, so far makes no sense. My attitude [*Einstellung*] towards him is an attitude towards a soul. I am not of the *opinion* that he has a soul' (PI 178). Here Wittgenstein wants to remind us that our concepts of the mental are inseparable from expressive behaviour. To be a competent user of the word 'pain' is, among other things, to be able to apply it appropriately to a range of behaviours that express pain. On many occasions we do apply the concept on the basis of seeing pain in the behaviour presented (or so we say). Being able to see certain actions, gestures, and facial expressions as expressive of pain is part of our grasp of the concept. In emphasising *attitude*, Wittgenstein is noting that seeing behaviour as expressive of pain and, more generally, understanding what pain is, involve being prepared to respond appropriately to another person – out of pity, or in anger, or with respect. Sometimes our attitude will be one of disbelief. We may neglect the demands and wishes of others, ignore them, turn our backs on them. When was the last time you turned your back on a cauliflower? Did this change your relationship to the cauliflower? Can you give your full attention to your cauliflower's needs? Where there can be doubt as to state of mind, there will be room for

particular attitudes and a capacity for response. This capacity will constitute the content of the conviction that it is *that* particular state of mind to which one is responding.

Wittgenstein's description of how attributions of behaviour support claims about other minds challenges the ease with which the sceptical interpretation of the relation between behaviour and mind gets off the ground. He is well aware that, from the sceptic's point of view, he will seem to be advocating a rather dogmatic behaviourism: as one of his interlocutors asks, 'But doesn't what you say come to this: that there is no pain, for example, without *pain-behaviour*?' His reaction is brusque: '– It comes to this: only of a living human being and what resembles (behaves like) a living human being can one say: it has sensations; it sees; is blind; hears; is deaf; is conscious or unconscious' (PI 281). This may appear to be a strange response to the charge of behaviourism. Restricting attributions of mental states to a particular range of bodies seems merely to stipulate limits on the range of behaviours or movement to which the mental concepts in question can be meaningfully applied. Wittgenstein means, however, not to produce a general account of the relation between behaviour and mind, but to resist the terms in which the demand for such an account is posed. Only in certain contexts can we find a hook for mental concepts. These contexts are *constituted* in part by the actual involvement of certain, typically human, faces, bodies and movements. We cannot describe what these contexts *are* in isolation from our ability and willingness to read behaviour as expressive of mind. The circumstances in which expressive behaviour appears are always already tinged with mindedness, if you will; these are circumstances in which we make *sense* of faces, bodies and movements as expressive and in so doing display a repertoire of responses appropriate to mindedness.<sup>19</sup> In contrast, it is not clear what it would be to wonder whether a stone or a moss was minded, what we are supposed to imagine here.<sup>20</sup> If we bracket our ability to make sense of behaviour as expressive of mind, we alter the context with which we are dealing. And only by doing so do we create the need for a general account of the kind that Wittgenstein resists.

These considerations put Wittgenstein in a position to hint that the sceptic has begun with a conception of the other's body as stone-like. That this is the sceptic's philosophical imposition is suggested by Wittgenstein's unsuccessful efforts to conceive of situations in which others were treated like stones or stones like others. The sceptic needs to produce circumstances in which his doubts cannot be ignored and in which they force the general question of how behaviour justifies talk of minds on us. He can only succeed, however, by bracketing the background attitudes that inform our responses to others (and which, generally speaking, partially constitute the circumstances in which we and the others are involved). Of course, whether our particular attitudes are appropriate to a given circumstance may be a live question, but we need more reason than that to entertain the possibility of a wholesale suspicion, let alone suspension, of our attitudes towards others in general.

It is almost inevitable that the sceptic will hear a significant concession in Wittgenstein's talk of attitudes. He will take it to mean that our commitments are non-cognitive, and while it is misleading to seize upon the notion of attitude in the way the sceptic does here, we may feel hard-pressed to say exactly how it is wrong. But the response has already been anticipated: '*Einstellung*' conveys the idea of an orientation towards others, an attunement to the possibilities present in the physiognomy of a given human situation. It seems doubtful that the sceptic has broached a question of justification with respect to our orientation to others that is not dependent on a picture of a gap between expression and what it expresses; further, on this picture, the possibility of a lack of such responsiveness is presumed to be implicit in our ordinary position, accurately described. The sceptic has simply imposed his own standards of accuracy here, and we have still not been apprised of a question about whether all such attitudes are tainted with arbitrariness. Behaviour has been rendered inanimate before the game begins. In cases where behaviour and mind will not line up, there will be specific stories to tell about the minds involved. The possibility that others might turn out to be mindless automata, in substance more stone-like than human, does not yet pose a threat to all of those stories.

Where does the shift to questions about our attitudes and relations towards others leave the sceptic's case? The turn to acknowledgement and attitude makes our capacity for response the crux of the matter. I may or may not be willing and able to provide aid or comfort or sympathy in the face of the other's pain, but my recognition of the demands that his or her expressions put on me and my sense of what counts as an appropriate reaction are inseparable from my understanding of what pain is.<sup>21</sup> What accounts for the relevance of my responses to the issue of the other is not an underlying certainty that the other is human but rather my openness to his or her expressions of humanity.

Recall that Cavell diagnoses the sceptic's failure as the failure to find a best case of knowledge of the other, a situation in which the other on whom we are focused is representative of all our best opportunities for knowing. In any given case, our attention will be drawn to *this* other; by singling him or her out, we render this particular person, or this particular relationship, the issue. In Cavell's view, this shifting of our concern shows that our doubts and limitations are contingent parts of our daily lives, not the distressing upshot of reflection on our cognitive powers. In other words, I am already to some extent prepared for it to turn out (shocking though it would be) that my mother or my significant other is quite different from the one I expected, quite unknown to me; I am not ready to discover that this is not a hand. Our everyday attitudes may well have incorporated the worst the sceptic can imagine befalling us. As Cavell puts it:

There is nothing about other minds that satisfies me for *all* (practical) purposes; I already know everything scepticism concludes,

that my ignorance of the existence of others is not the fate of my natural condition as a human knower, but my way of inhabiting that condition; that I cannot close my eyes to my doubts of others and to their doubts and denials of me, that my relations with others are restricted, that I cannot trust them blindly.

(Cavell 1979: 432)

The implication is that my failures to know others, to overcome my doubts, may well be my problem and, to the best of my knowledge, my responsibility.

## 6 Living our scepticism: the question of motivation

Now we are ready to place Cavell's speculation that we live our scepticism. What is it to do so? The idea receives no fixed, canonical formulation, but emerges repeatedly as an 'intuition' that strikes Cavell as he ponders the asymmetries between external world and other minds scepticism:

In the sense in which we can arrive at scepticism with respect to the external world we cannot arrive at scepticism with respect to other minds; or rather. . . with respect to the external world, an initial sanity requires recognising that I cannot live my scepticism, whereas with respect to others a final sanity requires recognising that I can. I do.

(Cavell 1979: 451)

Here, Cavell deliberately courts an air of paradox which forces us to work back through the relations between doubt and sanity. That I can arrive at scepticism with respect to the external world *requires* that I cannot live it? Yes, because what this scepticism would have me believe is that I have no rational ground on which to stand with respect to where, everyday, I live. Life and reflection are (shockingly) at odds. But then, in a sense, life will always provide a sane-sounding 'route of exit from the mood' of loss that sceptical reflection prompts, 'an alternative to this mood' in 'the joining again of the healthy, everyday world' (Cavell 1979: 447). A strict line between sanity and rationality is requisite to the sceptic's case here, because without a definite claim to rationality he *has* no case. On the other hand, the *sound* of craziness ('This is as a dream') is not incidental to the significance of his sense of loss. Whereas the failure of other minds scepticism to get in the same sense off the ground reflects that we are already apprised of the difficulties of knowing others, that the everyday sense of the matter does not even appear to provide assurances of the comforts of home (home is not necessarily so comfortable). To suppose otherwise indulges in a (sometimes sweet, sometimes terrifying)

fantasy of a kind of intimacy as our natural state from which we have fallen. That is to say:

My intuition that, on the contrary, I can live my scepticism with respect to other minds, is an intuition that there is no comparable, general alternative to the radical doubt of the existence of others; that we may already be as outside, in community, as we can be; that, accordingly, such a doubt does not bear the same relation to the idea of lunacy.

(Cavell 1979: 447)

At any juncture, we may experience others as strangers to us or ourselves as strangers to them. Doubt here has less of an initial ring of craziness, but the possible isolating effects of doubt – particularly where it is in service of my sense of my *own* unknownness, where I come to doubt that I can ever be known – are pervasive.

At another point, Cavell finds himself prompted to say ‘we have not permitted ourselves a best case’ (Cavell 1979: 439), again emphasising our responsibility in the matter: we have not allowed ourselves to know or be known. Cavell wants to stress that each moment with others contains the prospect of both doubt *and* (if I let myself be open to the other, and the other to me) its overcoming. Given this, it becomes important to ask what *motivates* the sceptic to try to universalise our everyday doubts and anxieties about others, to deny the very possibility of coming over to the other, to construct a philosophical problem out of the everyday phenomena, even to erect a metaphysical barrier between minds. Cavell’s claim that we live our scepticism is meant to provide a diagnosis of the sceptic’s motives here.

The idea is that we are liable to seek out ways to avoid the difficulties with which the ‘project’ of understanding others may present us. We take the sceptic seriously despite his proneness to overgeneralisation because his denial of knowledge expresses an intelligible, even a prevailing, wish to rationalise the rigours of our relations with others as a disappointment with knowledge as such. In an evocative but complex moment, Cavell writes:

In saying that we live our scepticism, I mean to register . . . ignorance about our everyday position toward others – not that we positively know that we are never, or not ordinarily, in best cases for knowing of the existence of other, but that we are rather disappointed in our occasions for knowing, as though we have, or have lost, some picture of what knowing another, or being known by another, would really come to – a harmony, a concord, a union, a transparency, a governance, a power – against which our actual successes at knowing, and being known, are poor things.

(Cavell 1979: 440)

Even here, where Cavell is remarking the vagaries of our everyday interactions with others, he is suggesting that our concerns are experienced as a ‘disappointment’ most naturally expressed by a picture the sceptic provides, in terms of which our genuine accomplishments will be found wanting.<sup>22</sup> Implicit here is a tendency to want to find comfort in the philosophical idea that we simply could not know others where all we are entitled to conclude is that as yet, ‘we cannot find our feet with them’ (PI p. 223). To live our scepticism is to read our ignorance of others, our failures of intimacy and understanding, as out of our hands.

Wittgenstein notes that ‘we . . . say of some people that they are transparent to us. It is, however, important as regards this observation that one human being can be a complete enigma to another.’ (PI p. 223) Part of acknowledging the other as other is to grant that nothing guarantees that he or she will not remain an enigma, forever beyond the grasp of the concepts we have available. This is to allow the other a kind of separateness, we might say autonomy. While the barriers between us may not be simply of our own making, they are not metaphysically indestructible or impenetrable. On the other hand, there is always the other, capable of erecting new walls or tearing them down in unanticipated ways. Letting the other be the other requires both a capacity for resolute attentiveness to his or her particularity and a willingness to wait for the other to reveal him- or herself. Here Cavell sees the everyday matter of relating to others as ‘an exceptional’ – and we might say spiritual – ‘achievement’ (Cavell 1979: 463).

## 7 Scepticism and tragedy

Achievements in this sphere are, we might think, attended with counterpart possibilities of failure. Everyday but exceptional achievement is likely to face the possibility of failures both dramatic and familiar. Indeed, this is how Cavell characterises our actual situation: ‘The surmise that we have become unable to count one another, to count for one another, is philosophically a surmise that we have lost the capacity to think, that we are stupefied. I call this condition living our scepticism’ (Cavell 1988: 127). Why does Cavell choose this (perhaps theatrical) label for a present, if typically unheeded and unnoticed, danger of spiritual failure? Scepticism about other minds has conceived of itself as a form of intellectual scrupulousness driven by a desire to understand our cognitive limits and to rein in our intellectual pretensions. Cavell proposes that the motivation and attraction behind scepticism can better be analysed as symptomatic of a very real wish to deny a potentially tragic dimension in our relation to others. ‘Tragedy’, he goes so far as to say, ‘is an interpretation of what scepticism is itself an interpretation of’ (Cavell 1987: 6).<sup>23</sup> What is this tragic dimension? Again, it will be something unexceptional and unexceptionable (so much so as to be likely to remain unnoticed) if also potentially crushing in its consequences. What is it but that, simply put, that

we are separate from other people, and that our separateness creates barriers between us; further, that overcoming barriers is a matter of our finding the means to express ourselves and of allowing others to do so? These plain aspects of human life need be neither sceptical nor tragic; you might count yourself fortunate that you can never *be* me. Cavell is concerned that we are prone to make them so: we are prone to want to shirk the responsibilities the plain facts of separateness bring in tow, and scepticism promises a metaphysical consolation for the anxieties with which the prospect of responding to others and making ourselves understood are fraught. It transmutes the fact of separateness and the lack of a guarantee that I shall be capable of responding to the other into a hyperbolic wish to know the other by feeling his or her pain. That wish *is*, naturally and necessarily, doomed to disappointment. For the sceptic, then, the knowledge we want proves impossible, and accepting our limitations appears to be the better part of wisdom. This interpretation of our separateness represents an ‘attempt to convert the human condition, the condition of humanity, into an intellectual difficulty’, Cavell (1979: 493) says; the sceptic takes ‘a metaphysical finitude as an intellectual lack’ (Cavell 1976: 263). The sceptic has numbed himself to the possibilities and pleasures attending the acknowledgement of genuine otherness.

It is hard to deny that this turning away is the stuff of tragedy. Othello’s precipitous doubts about Desdemona are set off by the merest of ‘reasons’; his determination to heed them is a failure to see that he must accept Desdemona’s acknowledgement of him as separate, an acceptance that demands that he in turn acknowledge her. Cavell is explicit about not taking each of us to be an Othello, but he does claim that we see how tragedies figure our lives: ‘There is no human alternative to the possibility of tragedy’ (Cavell 1979: 453). The sceptic in us will try to use a picture that measures our access to others in terms of knowledge and that results in putting others inevitably beyond reach in order to limit the possibility of tragedy. In doing so, however, our scepticism contributes to the ongoing realisation of the possibility of tragedy by distancing, even deadening, the other.

I have said more about what the problem of the other is not than about what it is. While the terms in which the sceptic conceptualises the problem ultimately disfigure it, inviting answers where there are no questions, we should nevertheless prize the sceptic’s challenge for pointing us towards an understanding of how knowledge of others comes to be, humanly or existentially speaking, at issue.<sup>24</sup>

## Notes

1 Gould’s book does much to show how to think about crucial issues concerning Cavell’s writing, his development, and his relations to ‘traditional’ and ‘analytic’ philosophy (as well as to Austin and Wittgenstein). The need to work systematically through the relation between the fate of the sceptic’s arguments, the truth of scepticism, and the thought of living our scepticism became more apparent

to me in reading Gould (1996), a presentation at an American Philosophical Association Eastern Division session, on which I commented.

- 2 Stephen Mulhall is correct to point out that 'as Cavell puts it, the truth in scepticism is not exactly a truth' (Mulhall 1994: 106).
- 3 At this point in *The Claim of Reason* we are referred back to the earlier essay 'The Avoidance of Love' (in Cavell 1976: 324): 'We think scepticism must mean that we cannot know the world exists . . . Whereas what scepticism suggests is that since we cannot know the world exists, its presentness to us cannot be a function of knowing. The world is to be *accepted*; as the presentness of other minds is not to be known, but acknowledged.'
- 4 The phrase 'I live my scepticism' first appears in Cavell (1979) on p. 437; variants recur on pp. 440, 447–9 and 451–2.
- 5 As, it seems, in McGinn (1998), especially p. 45, which suggests that for Cavell talk of living one's scepticism is tantamount to finding a 'germ of truth' in other minds scepticism, a germ not present in the external world case. See also Eldridge (1997: 108), where 'pointing to the truth of scepticism' is identified with 'saying that we live our scepticism'. See also Fleming (1993, e.g. pp. 141–2); Fleming is criticised in Gould 1996. Mulhall, again correctly, writes that the sceptic 'invokes' a possibility (that we may fail to acknowledge, to face, others) that is, correctly understood, 'integral to the texture of ordinary life' (Mulhall 1994: 137). It must be made clear that this possibility is just that, a possibility, and that living with that possibility is very different from embracing it as a condition of our lives with others. That there is something confused in running these two themes together is suggested by the fact that Cavell takes the truth of scepticism to apply equally to the problem of the external world, where we are said *not* to live our scepticism (see Cavell 1979: 451). My view is that in the other minds case, seeing how the truth of scepticism emerges (through the failure of the sceptic's problem, as he understands it, to get off the ground) helps us further to appreciate that the attraction of scepticism lies in specific aspects of our ordinary relations to others that leave open the possibility that we live our scepticism.
- 6 On some of the difficulties involved, see Stroud 1989, and the mapping of the relation between the plain and the philosophical in Clarke 1972. How to characterise the philosophical and whether, and for what reasons, to claim it as one's own are questions central to Cavell's enterprise.
- 7 This general set-up is explored in Stroud 1989, in the process of trying to articulate the distinctive nature of the traditional epistemologist's questions about the possibility of knowledge.
- 8 On the sceptic's very effective response to the appeal to behavioural criteria as a direct answer to his questioning (or a direct refutation of his position), see Cavell 1979 Ch. 2.
- 9 See Sartre 1993: 36.
- 10 The sceptic will be tempted to provide further support for his case by appealing to the thought that his knowledge of his own mind is prior to any knowledge of behaviour or of others. The crux of the matter here will be whether one can have conceptions of the particular mental states we ascribe to others from one's own case alone, shorn of connections to anything external. Part of an answer would involve scrutinising our motivations for seeking such stripped-down conceptions and asking why we would have any reason to take them to be the same as, or relevantly connected to, the concepts we actually do ascribe both to ourselves and to others. A full response would require looking at the details of Wittgenstein's private language argument and Cavell's reading of it. See PI 243–315, and Cavell 1979: 329–54.

- 11 I take John McDowell to make a similar point in his 'Criteria, Defeasibility, and Knowledge' (in 1998a: 384–5).
- 12 See OC 341–4. The general 'belief' in other minds should be viewed, not as an *assumption*, but as what Wittgenstein here calls a hinge proposition. There is nothing it would *be*, in context, to question the hinge: 'the *questions* that we raise and our *doubts* depend on the fact that some propositions are exempt from doubt, are as it were like hinges on which those turn.' (OC 341).
- 13 Only in very particular circumstances would we offer these words. More often we would specify the behaviour exhibited. This behaviour could range from his calmly uttering the words, 'I am very, very angry', to his yelling and stomping around to his displaying a certain tension or a particular glint in his eyes or other signs which only an intimate of his would be able to appreciate.
- 14 See Cavell 1979: 161–2.
- 15 An analogous case was suggested to me by Tom Senor.
- 16 On automata and their kin, see Cavell 1979: 403–16.
- 17 Here there is an important difference from the case of the external world, where best cases are available, but (as it were) something happens to them when they are singled out. With the external world, the rationality of doubting in the particular instance of putative knowing would have to be secured by implicitly *introducing* something special and specific into the case. With others, the claim is, there is always already something particular, specific to the individual case at hand, so that doubts that arise there do not automatically generalise in the way that best cases are supposed to.
- 18 See Cavell's 'Knowing and Acknowledging' (in his 1976), as well as the quote from Cavell 1976: 324, in note 3. It would be misleading to call acknowledgement an alternative to knowledge, as though the two were uniform and competing relations to the same thing. Acknowledgement approaches the particulars directly, variously, and without theoretical foundation.
- 19 On the importance of the face, and more on the dangers of construing behaviour narrowly as bodily movements or intentional bodily movements, see Cockburn 1985.
- 20 See PI 284, 288.
- 21 See Cavell 1976: 263.
- 22 See Mulhall 1994: 137: 'The doubt and ignorance which the sceptic is prone to express in purely cognitive terms is seen by Cavell as integral to the texture of ordinary life when it is understood in terms of acknowledgement.' A double caution is called for here: first, what is integral to the texture of everyday life is that acknowledgement may always present an *issue*, one that knowledge will not settle for us; second, in expressing the aspect of the texture of ordinary life in which a best case is not or is not known to be available by using the notions of doubt and ignorance, we are not getting behind or beyond, but are using, the sceptic's 'purely cognitive terms'. These terms, however distorting, are apparently providing our most readily available ways of voicing our limitations (actually, our disappointed reactions to them).
- 23 Cavell's exploration of the connections between scepticism and tragedy begins with 'The Avoidance of Love' (in Cavell 1976) and continues in the reading of Othello with which Part IV of *The Claim of Reason* culminates (Cavell 1979: 481–96), and in the readings of Shakespeare collected in *Disowning Knowledge* (Cavell 1987). (Both 'The Avoidance of Love' and the treatment of Othello ('Othello and the Stake of the Other') appear in the latter volume.]
- 24 I would like to thank Daniel Brudney, David Cerbone and Richard Moran for discussion and comments, Randall Havas for continued conversations and Diana Nagel for valuable reactions.

## THE EVERYDAY ALTERNATIVE TO SCEPTICISM

Cavell and Wittgenstein on other minds

*Marie McGinn*

### I

The idea that Wittgenstein's later philosophy provides a refutation of the problem of scepticism about other minds is *prima facie* at odds with the emphasis that his remarks give to the uncertainty of our ordinary psychological language-game. The thought that the uncertainty of our language-game is 'constitutional' (RPP 1 141, RPP 2 657) may sound more like an endorsement of scepticism about other minds than a refutation of it. Similarly, the suggestion that '[t]he following . . . is true: I can't give criteria which put the presence of the sensation beyond doubt; that is to say: there are no such criteria' (RPP 1 137) seems to go against any idea that Wittgensteinian criteria are intended to allow us to establish the mental states of others 'with certainty'. Stanley Cavell was the first to draw attention to the prevalence of the theme of uncertainty in Wittgenstein's remarks, and to question interpretations, such as Norman Malcolm's, which found, in these remarks, an argument for the necessity of criteria for mental states, which 'establish beyond question' the existence of the mental state in others.<sup>1</sup> Cavell's reading of Wittgenstein sets out, on the one hand, to diagnose the way in which the sceptic about other minds misrepresents the obstacle to our achieving certainty, and on the other, to articulate the true nature of our predicament *vis-à-vis* others. The result is an interpretation which rejects the thought that Wittgenstein is committed to some form of common-sense rejection of scepticism about other minds, and replaces it with the claim that Wittgenstein accepts that something akin to sceptical doubt already haunts our ordinary language-game. It is this claim that I want to examine in this chapter.

### II

The hope of the Malcolm reading of Wittgensteinian criteria is that the criteria on the basis of which we apply mental concepts to others are such that

it does not make sense to suppose that criteria are satisfied and the person is not in the relevant mental state.<sup>2</sup> Cavell points out that the claim that this concept of criteria provides a refutation of scepticism is made problematic by Malcolm's need to acknowledge that criteria cannot be expressed in the form of logically necessary and sufficient conditions, for it is always possible, at least in principle, to doubt whether criteria are satisfied. However, Cavell's main objection to the reading does not focus on these internal inconsistencies, but on the way in which the reading is false to Wittgenstein's intentions. As Cavell sees it, Wittgenstein's appeal to criteria is not meant to provide a refutation of scepticism, but is intended, on the contrary, to reveal that 'criteria come to an end' (Cavell 1979: 412); that is, to show that it is an essential feature of our ordinary language-game that there is no possibility of specifying circumstances in which doubt is impossible. This acknowledgement of an intrinsic uncertainty vis-à-vis the mental states of others amounts, for Cavell, to a recognition that, unlike scepticism about the external world, scepticism about other minds is not something entirely alien to our commonsense position, but touches on a doubt which is already, in some sense, real to us. Thus, the possibilities for doubt about others that the sceptic about other minds exploits are not as remote from ordinary life as those of the sceptic about the external world; our ordinary mastery of our language-game makes us aware how something in the nature of our concepts already invites the sort of doubt the sceptic expresses. Scepticism about other minds is not something which, even from within the context of our everyday lives, we feel we can reject out of hand. The main burden of Cavell's discussion is to provide a diagnosis of our relative weakness in the face of sceptical doubt about others, which does not mythologise or misrepresent the way in which the other necessarily eludes my grasp.

Much of this discussion is directed against the idea that my separation from the other is properly understood as my being metaphysically shut out from all but my own mental states. This picture of the other as (somehow) hidden within his body is, for Cavell, no more than a mythological description of my separation, which surreptitiously invites us to misunderstand the way in which my relation with the other necessarily falls short of certainty. We need, he believes, to understand our separateness in a way that does not suggest we are separated *by* something, or that there is some physical or logical *barrier* to my knowledge of the other. However, finding a way of expressing the fact of our separateness without overstating or misrepresenting it, in the way the sceptic about other minds does, proves very difficult. It is not clear that Cavell is satisfied with any of the formulations that he comes up with. And yet he feels that there is something essentially problematic about my knowledge of others which makes me recognise the doubts of the philosophical sceptic as an extreme or inflated version of an unease which I already feel.

Thus, while Cavell rejects the traditional sceptic's idea that I cannot know the other because my relation to the other is not immediate, he still wants to

hold that there is something in the nature of my relations with others that makes me feel that my knowledge is always less than ideal. It is not that the other is not there to be read, but rather that I'm aware that reading him involves an act of interpretation which is, in its nature, hazardous. Thus, my attribution of psychological states to another depends upon my readiness to see a particular sort of significance in the other's physiognomy and behaviour, that is, to see the latter as expressive of a human soul. My recognition of the other as 'minded' depends, therefore, on an unreasoned act of imagination – of 'empathic projection' – whereby I enter into an implicit pact with the other: I allow him to elicit a certain sort of response in me. Cavell does not want to claim that it follows from the fact that recognition of the other is, in this sense, grounded in me that I can *never* be certain of the existence of others. Such an unqualified rejection of the possibility of being certain goes against what Cavell acknowledges to be our ordinary (unfulfilled) hope that the other will make himself transparent to us. Furthermore, he wants to avoid the suggestion, which an absolute rejection of the possibility of being certain might seem to imply, namely, that there is some other, superior, more direct way of knowing the mental states of others.<sup>3</sup> The way in which my awareness that my reading of the other has its roots in me forces me to acknowledge that scepticism about other minds is something that I 'live' needs, Cavell believes, a less pessimistic, more circumspect, expression.

It is not, Cavell suggests, that I know that I can never know of the existence of others, but rather that 'I do not know whether empathic projection is, or is not, a sufficient basis for acknowledging the other's existence' (Cavell 1979: 428). Yet this is enough, Cavell believes, to leave me unable to reject the sceptic's doubts outright. For although it is true that there is no way to give adequate – i.e. non-mythological – expression to a strictly sceptical problem about the existence of other minds, it is also the case that the grounding of our language-game in empathic projection forces us to acknowledge that 'there is no everyday *alternative* to scepticism concerning other minds' (*ibid.*: 432). It is, Cavell argues, an essential part of my ordinary understanding of this region of my language that I am already aware of the fact that my knowledge of the other necessarily falls short of an ideal, and so I am left in a position in which I cannot give a confident and certain answer to the sceptic's question: 'How do you know there are other human beings?'. Cavell sums up his conclusion as follows:

In saying that we live our scepticism, I mean to register this ignorance about our everyday position towards others – not that we positively know that we are never in a best case for knowing of the existence of others, but that we are rather disappointed in our occasions for knowing, as though we have a picture of what knowing another would really come to, against which our actual successes look like poor things.

(Cavell 1979: 440)

It is clear that this attempt to articulate the way in which I am forced to 'live' scepticism about other minds does not locate the everyday problem of others in the indirectness of my knowledge of the other, or in a necessary shortfall in the evidence available to me. I have already emphasised that Cavell's claim, that a sense of dissatisfaction colours our ordinary occasions for knowing others and makes the rejection of scepticism impossible, goes along with a rejection of the traditional formulation of the sceptical problem. Yet, despite this explicit break with traditional scepticism, Cavell's assertion that 'there is no everyday *alternative* to scepticism concerning other minds' invites comparison with the traditional philosophical position.

First of all, by suggesting that our everyday position vis-à-vis others is not intrinsically opposed to the doubts of the sceptic, Cavell implicitly suggests that a doubt about the *existence* of others is not inimical to our ordinary language-game. Second, by appearing to make uncertainty a universal feature of our relations with others, Cavell's conclusion suggests both that we are always uncertain and that, ultimately at least, the source of our uncertainty lies in something essential and inescapable. Thus, Cavell preserves a sense that our ordinary uncertainty has a metaphysical significance, that is, that it reveals something essential about the relation between one subject and another, which underlies or explains the character of our language-game. As we've seen, Cavell rejects the sceptic's image of my being metaphysically shut out from the other's mental states, but he nevertheless believes that the uncertainty which characterises our language-game reveals that there is something essentially correct in the idea of my being separate from the other:

The truth here is that we *are* separate, but not necessarily *separated* (*by* something): that we are, each of us, bodies, i.e. embodied; each is this one and not that, each here and not there, each now and not then.

(Cavell 1979: 369)

Thus, even while Cavell rejects the traditional sceptic's picture of the essential hiddenness of the other, he still holds that our ordinary uncertainty has its roots in the metaphysical separation of myself and the other, that is, in the essential truth that I am I and he is he, in the metaphysical gap that makes us two and not one. Finally, in drawing a link between the uncertainty of our ordinary language-game and scepticism, Cavell makes it look as if the only way to rebut scepticism is to achieve what Malcolm's interpretation sets out to achieve, namely, a demonstration that there must be occasions which can serve as 'paradigm cases', in which doubt is senseless, and the existence of others can be 'established beyond question'. For he has argued that it is precisely the necessary absence of such 'paradigm cases' that makes it impossible for us to reject the sceptical doubt about the existence of others, and

forces us to accept that our everyday position towards others is essentially one of ignorance. In the remainder of this chapter I want to argue that all of these features of Cavell's position are at odds with the fundamental lessons of Wittgenstein's remarks.

### III

It was, as I remarked earlier, Cavell who first drew attention to the emphasis that Wittgenstein's remarks place upon the uncertainty of our ordinary language-game. Although I want ultimately to show that one important aspect of Cavell's treatment of this uncertainty is at odds with some of the main strands of Wittgenstein's thought, this central insight – that one of the principal aims of Wittgenstein's discussion is not to escape from it but to put it in the right light – remains untouched. The same applies to Cavell's diagnosis of the mythology that lies behind traditional scepticism about other minds. The trouble with traditional scepticism is, as Cavell argues, that, by presenting it as a matter of my being shut out from something that only the other can have genuine knowledge of, it completely misrepresents the nature of our everyday uncertainty. My sense of a clash between Cavell's discussion and the purport of Wittgenstein's remarks focuses, therefore, entirely on the following idea: our everyday uncertainty about others means that our ordinary language-game is in some way less hostile to scepticism about other minds than it is to scepticism about the external world. I want to argue that Wittgenstein's remarks are fundamentally opposed to the idea that our everyday doubts amount to a way of 'living' scepticism about other minds, or reveal the truth in the sceptic's image of the metaphysical separation of one self from another. Thus, the remarks are aimed not merely at countering our desire to see any metaphysical significance in the features of our ordinary language-game, but at pinpointing the precise ways in which the question of the philosophical sceptic is utterly remote from the doubt which characterises our everyday use of psychological concepts. I want to show that it is Wittgenstein's aim to trace the physiognomy of doubt, and that in doing so he is not only careful to make a 'logical' distinction between our everyday doubts about others and sceptical, or philosophical, doubt, but also to differentiate the uncertainty which may be said to characterise the language-game in general from the real doubts that arise on particular, concrete occasions.

One of our main concerns, therefore, is with Wittgenstein's attempt to anatomise the complex relations that exist between the doubts of the philosophical sceptic, the uncertainty which is a distinguishing mark of this region of our language, and the forms of doubt concerning others that arise on particular, concrete occasions. One of the unsatisfactory features of Cavell's discussion is that it can serve to obscure the very distinctions that Wittgenstein's remarks are attempting to reveal. Thus, two of the central

themes of Wittgenstein's discussion are, on the one hand, the logical difference between sceptical doubt and the uncertainty which arises as a practical form of doubt in particular, concrete circumstances, and on the other, the importance of distinguishing between the latter and the general uncertainty which is a feature of the grammar of our psychological concepts. It is by enabling us to see these distinctions clearly that Wittgenstein puts both our particular uncertainties and the general uncertainty of our language-game 'in the right light', that is, in a light which shows both to be logically distinct from the doubts of the philosophical sceptic; our everyday uncertainties leave our capacity to reveal the emptiness of the sceptic's doubts quite untouched.

## IV

When we are struck, in philosophy, by the thought that the other is hidden from us, we are inclined to justify our thought by reference to the possibility for pretence. The possibility that the other's expression of pain or affection or interest may be simulated seems, from a position of reflection, to open up a logical gap between the state (the sensation, the emotion) itself and the outer evidence for it. The outer evidence appears to be devalued: if someone can pretend to be in pain, then the outer signs of pain must necessarily fall short of the facts. Wittgenstein's response to this is not only to show that it rests upon a misunderstanding of the way in which the concept of pretence actually functions, but to bring out how the philosopher's constant harking on pretence, as the source of the general uncertainty in our language-game, is fundamentally misleading. In this section I want to focus on the first of these points, and leave the discussion of Wittgenstein's own account of the general uncertainty of the game until section 8.

What we are concerned with here is the way that Wittgenstein attempts to put pretence in a new light by presenting it, not as a defect, or as something which reveals a shortcoming in our evidence, but as connected with the ramifying of our language-game into the intricate and irregular structure which characterises our human life together: "Feigning" poses no problem with the concept of pain. It makes it more complicated' (LW 1 876). Thus, if we think of the complexity of behaviour and circumstance required for us to identify something as an expression of pain, then we can see that identifying a creature as engaged in pretence, insofar as this brings in the ideas of motive, intention to deceive, mimicry, etc., requires an even greater complexity in both behaviour and context. Some primitive forms of pretence may occur in non-human animals – e.g. a female behaving as if she is wounded in order to draw a predator away from her young – but other forms – e.g. various kinds of deceitful excuse for idle or weak behaviour – presuppose, not only a language, but a whole cultural context. Seen in this way, pretence does not threaten to disconnect the 'inner' from the 'outer', but begins to draw

our attention to the way in which our mastery of this region of our language involves our being drawn into an almost unimaginably complicated pattern of behaviour and response. Much of this complex pattern has nothing at all to do with deceit, but touches on aspects of human life – acting, illustrating, joking, mocking, imagining, practising, etc. – which most sharply distinguish us from animals. As we shall see, one of the most important themes of Wittgenstein's discussion is that our ordinary psychological concepts cannot be characterised or understood independently of the complex, ill-defined set of human activities in which their use is embedded. Acquiring our concepts and coming to participate in the wide range of interlocking activities within which they are employed is, for Wittgenstein, one and the same. What he wants to show us is that pretence is to be seen as a part of the pattern in the complex weave of activities with which the use of our concepts is inextricably intertwined; pretence is not something extraneous to our language-game, but a distinctive element in its overall structure.

Deceit, too, has to be looked at in the context of this complex weave of human behaviour, which is the natural setting for our concepts. As part of his general aim of countering the philosopher's false and unrealistic picture of pretence, Wittgenstein tries to persuade us to resist the temptation to think that the child grasps the possibility of dissimulation as soon as it understands the concept of pain in its simplest and most primitive application, i.e. its application in situations in which the question of deceitful pretence is not raised. Rather, the child is gradually led into the ramifications of our language-game, so that it 'not only learns the use of the expression 'to be in pain' in all its persons, tenses, and numbers, but also in connection with negation and the verbs of opinion' (LW 1 874). Wittgenstein is anxious to emphasise not only the intrinsic complexity of our language-game, but also that the process of acquiring mastery of this complex system of linguistic techniques is inseparable from the child's being drawn into a life with others. Thus, the child's acquisition of the conceptual distinctions of our ordinary language-game is a matter of his natural responses to others gradually becoming more discerning and more discriminating, and of his gradually becoming alive to the significance of subtle variations in language, circumstances, facial expression, tone of voice, mien and gesture. Becoming at home in our language depends upon our learning when to be certain and when to doubt whether another's expression of, say, pain is genuine. This learning is above all a matter of our becoming involved in the complexities of human behaviour, of refining and developing our discriminatory abilities, our possibilities for action, and our natural ways of behaving towards others. In this way, not only our forms of description, but also our responses of trust or mistrust, sympathy or suspicion, concern or indifference, and so on, become ever more finely tuned to distinctions in circumstances and to the nuances of human expression and behaviour. Thus:

Believing that someone else is in pain, doubting whether he is, are so many natural kinds of behaviour towards other human beings; and our language is but an auxiliary to and extension of this behaviour. I mean: our language is an extension of more primitive behaviour. (For our *language-game* is a piece of behaviour.)

(RPP 1 151)

Again, the underlying current of Wittgenstein's remarks is towards bringing out the way in which our acquisition of our language-game – in this case of the use of expressions for psychological concepts in connection with verbs of opinion – is made from within a position of involvement with others. We do not learn these linguistic techniques merely by observing human beings, in the way that we might observe the life of a fish or a plant, but acquire them from a perspective of participation, in which our understanding of this region of our language is inseparable from our responsive engagement with others; acquiring our ordinary psychological concepts is already to be caught up in a life of mutual, interactive relations with others.

## V

Although the idea that our psychological concepts are inextricably embedded in the stream of human life is a recurrent theme of his remarks, Wittgenstein is also keen to stress that we are not to understand this as the claim that certain sorts of experience are vital to our understanding of these concepts. Our language-game depends upon a certain sort of reciprocity, but this is to be understood in terms of our possessing the particular capacities for expression and response on which our discriminative abilities depend. Yet it might be asked whether having certain experiences is essential to our possessing these capacities: 'What kind of language-games can someone who is unacquainted with fear *eo ipso* not play?' Wittgenstein gives his first reaction as follows:

One could say, for example, that he would watch a tragedy without understanding it. And that could be explained this way: when I see someone else in a terrible situation, even when I myself have nothing to fear, I can shudder out of sympathy. But someone who is unacquainted with fear wouldn't do that. *We* are afraid along *with the other person*, even when we have nothing to fear; and it is *this* which the former cannot do. Just as I grimace when someone else is hurt.

(RPP 2 27)

However, on reflection, this seems too simple, for 'isn't it conceivable that someone who has never felt pain could still feel it in the form of pity?' (RPP 2 28). But then would we call it pity, if he isn't acquainted with any pain of his

own? The inconclusiveness of Wittgenstein's response to these questions suggests that he believes that, in the end, there is no clear answer to them; we cannot say just what a speaker must be capable of feeling in order to be led into the system of mutual involvement that is essential to our participation in our ordinary language-game; we cannot say that this or that experience is a necessary condition for possessing this or that concept, learning this or that linguistic technique. Thus, the idea that an understanding of our ordinary language-game depends upon our entering into a characteristic form of engagement with others is to be carefully distinguished from any form of psychological account of the meaning of psychological concepts.

Wittgenstein brings out the way in which our mastery of our ordinary psychological concepts is inextricably bound up with our mutual engagement with others, by means of a number of comparisons. For example, he compares our ordinary concepts with a set of concepts that are applied solely on the basis of observed patterns of behaviour and which have no related first-person usage:

One could suppose that whoever talks about human beings [thinking, wishing, being happy or angry] in this way had just observed these kinds of behaviour in other beings and was now saying that these phenomena could also be observed in human beings.

That would be like our saying this of a species of animals.

(RPP 2 33)

He suggests that we might see the relation between our ordinary concepts and the concepts of this behaviouristic language as something like the relation between concepts which pass over from everyday language into medical language, e.g. the concept of shock. The medical concept of shock comes to mean a particular, objectively defined phenomenon, which, although its application has implications for future treatment, is applied by the medical practitioner disinterestedly, on the basis of specific criteria. Contrast this with our ordinary use of the concept of shock, in which it is not employed as the concept of an objective phenomenon identified by precise criteria, but is used, in the third person, to describe a whole range of responses in others, and, in the first person, to express a vast assortment of forms of disapproval, disgust and rejection. We can imagine the well-defined medical concept being acquired by an attentive alien, but the same cannot be said of its everyday counterpart. The ordinary concept exhibits a degree of complexity and indeterminateness that not only makes its capture by a precise rule impossible, but makes it inconceivable that its use could be understood independently of a responsive engagement in the situations within which it is used. The ability to use our ordinary concept is so bound up with our ordinary involvement in human life that it is impossible to extract an understanding of the concept from this cultural embedding.

An analogous contrast is to be drawn between the sort of behaviouristic concepts described above, or the simplified, objective concepts that are used within the science of psychology, and our ordinary psychological concepts. The former are applied, on the basis of well-defined criteria and from a disinterested point of view, to a form of life that is foreign to us. As Wittgenstein says:

[They deal] with certain *aspects* of human life.

Or: with certain phenomena. – But the words ‘thinking’, ‘feeling’, etc., etc. do *not* refer to these phenomena.

(RPP 2 35)

The latter concepts are not applied to others as we might apply the concept of pain or excitement to a fish, but are the tangled and involved concepts of everyday life. These concepts do not simply describe phenomena, but, as the fact of their having a first- and a third-person use reveals, operate within the perspective of our essential involvement in the life that gives them their significance. The use of these concepts – both first- and third-person – is embedded in the vast cultural web of our complex and involved life with one another. It is not that someone who didn’t think or feel in a certain way could not understand these concepts, but that someone who did not employ these concepts in both their first-person and their third-person use, within the interactive bustle of human life, would not count as a master of our ordinary language-game.<sup>4</sup>

## VI

We saw in the previous section how Wittgenstein tries to bring out the way in which our mastery of the concepts of our ordinary language-game is inseparable from our immersion in the complex system of responses and relations which constitutes the stream of human life. Seeing our ordinary certainty or doubts about others as ‘so many natural kinds of behaviour towards human beings’ (RPP 1 151) is just one element in this process of coming to recognise the way the use – i.e. the meaning – of our words is tied up with their embedding in a life of mutual involvement with others. What I want to focus on in this section is the significance of this for our understanding of the relation between ordinary doubt – i.e. doubt on a particular, concrete occasion – and sceptical or philosophical doubt. Wittgenstein compares real cases of uncertainty and the philosophical doubt in a number of places. For example:

We all know the doctor’s question ‘Is he in pain?’; and the uncertainty as to whether a person under anaesthetic feels pain when he groans; but the philosophical question whether someone else is in

pain is completely different; it is not doubt about each individual in a particular case.

(LW 1 239)

But the philosophical question whether someone else feels pain is of a completely different nature; not the doubt applied in a certain case to *each*; therefore it must have a different logic.

(LW 1 variation on 239, Fn)

The idea that there is a difference between the ‘logic’ of the doctor’s question and that of the philosopher suggests that Wittgenstein believes that they represent two quite distinct forms of doubt. The doctor’s question is one that occurs within the normal flow of human life; that is to say, it is a *practical* question which arises in particular circumstances, when there are concrete reasons for raising a question about the significance of someone’s behaviour. The question is practical in so far as it expresses an uncertainty about how to act towards the other; and the answer to the question has practical consequences, not merely for treatment, but for the doctor’s immediate emotional response to his patient (e.g. for his degree of concern and general sense of urgency). By contrast, the philosopher’s question is an intellectual or theoretical one, which arises within a position of reflective withdrawal from interactive relations with others. The reasons for the doubt the philosopher raises do not draw on concrete aspects of a particular situation, but focus on an apparent conceptual possibility that applies to all cases, independently of circumstances. Moreover, the consequences of the answer that is given to the question are unclear, for whatever it is, it has no effect on the speaker’s everyday relations with others. When we see the differences between the two sorts of question clearly, then, Wittgenstein believes, we are beginning both to see the real nature of the philosopher’s doubt and to understand the background to its complete disconnection from our ordinary language-game.<sup>5</sup>

Wittgenstein uses the following comparison to shed further light on the difference between the two sorts of doubt:

Think of the uncertainty about whether animals, particularly lower animals, such as flies, feel pain.

The uncertainty whether a fly feels pain is philosophical; but couldn’t it also be instinctive? And how would that come out?

Indeed, aren’t we really uncertain in our behaviour towards animals? One doesn’t know: Is he being cruel or not?

(RPP 2 659)

The question whether a fly feels pain is ‘philosophical’ in so far as it arises as a purely theoretical question, e.g. in a context in which we are considering

how far down the phylogenetic scale the capacity for feeling or sensation extends. This theoretical question arises spontaneously in the case of flies, in part because our natural relation to the fly echoes the reflective detachment which the philosopher – on a necessarily temporary basis – adopts in relation to others. Thus, the forms of interactive involvement which characterise our relation with human beings, and, to a variable extent, with a variety of non-human animals, are largely absent in the case of the fly. In so far as we look at the fly from a position of total non-involvement – that is, in so far as we observe it simply as a spectacle or phenomenon – the concepts that we apply to it are not those of our primary or original language-game, but the impoverished remnant that remains of these concepts when we remove nearly all of the intricate connections, conceptual, emotional and practical, that constitute their natural setting. In an important sense, therefore, the language-game in which the theoretical question about the fly occurs is quite different from the language-game which is embedded in our human life together. In so far as it is purely theoretical, the sense and import of the question we ask concerning the fly is elusive and difficult to pin down. What Wittgenstein now suggests is that we ‘[l]ook at the problem of uncertainty as to whether someone else is feeling pain in the light of the question whether an insect feels pain’ (RPP 2 661). For while the philosopher’s doubt about others is in some ways comparable to the theoretical question whether an insect feels pain, a real case of uncertainty about what another feels, as it occurs within our primary language-game, has a myriad of connections, practical, emotional and conceptual, that warrant the claim that it is a wholly distinct form (or concept) of doubt.

As we have already seen, Wittgenstein is at pains to get us to recognise the way in which the doubt that occurs within our primary language-game constitutes a development of natural forms of behaviour towards others. It is not primarily an intellectual state of belief, but a mode of involvement with others, which is characterised by feelings of mistrust, and by a certain hesitancy or circumspection in our actions. In the quotation above, Wittgenstein contrasts the philosophical question about the fly with a more instinctive kind of uncertainty about animals, and explicitly connects the latter with an uncertainty ‘in our behaviour’. In the case of this more instinctive uncertainty, we experience the limit on the possibility for an involved kind of understanding of other animals in a kind of unsureness in our reactions to them (‘Is he being cruel or not?’). This kind of doubt is much closer to our ordinary uncertainty about another human being, for, unlike the philosophical question about the fly, it is not purely intellectual, but is expressed in a practical form of hesitancy or uneasiness in our responses. This form of doubt need not, Wittgenstein suggests, ‘stem from uncertainty in thought’, but occurs pre-reflectively, in the way I respond to, or conduct myself towards, others. Thus:

There is such a thing as trust and mistrust in behaviour!

If anyone complains, for example, I may be trustful and react with perfect confidence, or I may be uncertain, like someone who has his suspicions. Neither words nor thoughts are needed for this.

(RPP 2 662)

Our ordinary concept of doubt, unlike the one employed by the philosopher, operates within the horizon of these forms of behaviour, and possesses a specific, intricate pattern of connections with them. Thus, within our ordinary language-game, instead of saying, 'It is uncertain whether he is in pain', we might say 'Don't trust his expressions of pain', for what we really mean here is something like: attend carefully to what he says and does, be cautious in your expressions of sympathy, don't let him take advantage of you, and so on.

This careful articulation of the difference between philosophical scepticism and a real case of doubt about another's thoughts or feelings enables us to see the precise way in which the philosopher's doubt is idle or empty. In so far as the philosopher's question is asked abstractly, from a perspective of non-involvement, the doubt it expresses is essentially detached or disengaged from our mutual, everyday life with others. Yet it is the context of our ordinary involvement with others that fixes, however indeterminately, the host of conceptual and practical connections which constitute our ordinary concepts. Clearly, whatever power the philosopher's question has to seem important and significant trades upon our believing that it does not change the meaning of our words. However, we now see that while the philosopher's question – 'How do you know he is *really* in pain?' – may look as if it employs our ordinary concept of pain, and that the doubt it raises touches all our ordinary ascriptions of pain to others, it in fact uses expressions in a way which is quite remote from our ordinary language-game. Seen in this new light, both the question's intrinsic connection with an unnatural and unsustainable frame of mind, and the essential unclarity of what it asks, become apparent. The philosopher's doubt uses our ordinary words, but without their embedding in the stream of human life it is quite unclear what meaning attaches to them.<sup>6</sup> The question may give us an uncanny sense of looking at human beings as if they were an alien species, or even cleverly constructed automata, but the effect has an essential air of unreality and is necessarily temporary. It is not simply that the philosopher's question cannot take hold within my ordinary position of involvement with others, it cannot even be expressed there; the attenuated concept it employs and the kind of theoretical doubt it expresses are quite other than those of our ordinary language-game; our ordinary doubts about others – in so far as they are expressive of involvement – are inimical to the sort of doubt the sceptic's question expresses.

## VII

I suggested earlier that two of the unsatisfactory consequences of the connection Cavell makes between our ordinary uncertainty and sceptical doubt is, first, that it implicitly characterises the former as – at least in principle – a doubt about the *existence* of others, and second, that it implies that our ordinary uncertainty can ultimately be traced to a universal source, namely, my essential separateness from the other. We can now see why both of these ideas are at odds with what I've been arguing is the fundamental tendency of Wittgenstein's thought. Our ordinary doubts about what another is thinking or feeling, or about the genuineness of his expression, is, for Wittgenstein, a mode of involvement with the other, a way – often a particularly attentive way – of acting towards him. Thus, my everyday doubts about others are as much an expression of an attitude towards a soul as my confident feeling of sympathy for his suffering. Cavell does, of course, acknowledge that the suspicion that the other is somehow playing me false is still a way of affirming his existence, but he nevertheless insists that our ordinary relations with others are haunted by a possibility of isolation which makes the worry of the sceptic somehow real to us. Yet, in so far as the sorts of isolation that constitute the various forms of social withdrawal are essentially a form of rejection of (or by) others, they, unlike the doubts of the philosopher, are still a way of living in the human world. The refusal to communicate with others – even when it is grounded in a disappointment with our ability to know (or trust) the other – is still a way of responding to the social world that opens up with our language-game, and is thus a form of communication with others. Thus, the ordinary possibilities for human isolation are to be seen as occupying a place within the spectrum of potential ways of relating to others that exists within our language-game, and therefore as one more way of affirming the other's existence.

The following remark of Wittgenstein may, however, seem to go against the view that he completely rejects the idea of any connection between sceptical doubt and our ordinary language-game:

Do we encounter [the philosopher's] doubt in everyday life? No. But maybe something which is remotely related: indifference toward other people's expression of pain.

(LW 1 240)

But I believe it would be a mistake to interpret this remark as a qualification of Wittgenstein's sense of the disconnection between sceptical doubt and our ordinary language-game. First of all, the link that the remark makes between scepticism and everyday life does not focus on the problem of uncertainty, but on a particular kind of attitude that can be taken towards others, namely that of indifference. What is significant about this attitude is not that it ex-

presses uncertainty about the other, but that it involves a kind of detachment in which the other is observed but not responded to. On this interpretation, the remote relation between scepticism and everyday life does not invoke a universal unsureness in our relations with others, but the possibility of our ceasing to be involved with them, of our adopting an attitude which in some way resembles the disengaged perspective of the philosophical sceptic.

To look on another's pain or suffering with indifference is to treat it as a spectacle; the observer sees that the other is in pain, but only in the way that he sees that the chair is behind the desk or that there are flowers in the vase. The other is an element in the scene before him; asked what he sees, the observer may answer, 'A man crying in pain'. The description is simply a report of what he sees. The other has not become the focus of the observer's attention, he is not attentive to, or occupied with, the other. There is no response to the other; no shudder of horror or pang of compassion; nothing that makes the observer exclaim 'Oh, how he suffers'. It is one of the burdens of Wittgenstein's extensive discussion of seeing aspects to articulate the difference between these two sorts of case. Thus, he draws our attention to the distinction between observing a scene and describing what we see in a perceptual report and a visual experience which marks a certain sort of involvement with what is seen – suddenly noticing it, being struck by it, suddenly recognising it, seeing a similarity between it and something else, etc. – which is characteristically expressed in some form of exclamation. One of the important strands of Wittgenstein's remarks is concerned with tracing the role of this essentially involved perceptual experience in our appreciation of aesthetic objects. There is, he suggests, a sense of 'understanding' in which it is correct to say that only someone who is involved with and immediately responsive to a picture or a poem or a piece of music 'understands' it. In the same way, we might say that the unmoved onlooker doesn't understand the suffering that confronts him; not in the sense that he doesn't know of it, but in the sense that he *merely* knows of it, in the sense that he is not alive to it, that it doesn't really live for him.

There is, therefore, a sense in which, like the sceptic, the callous observer stands outside our ordinary, involved language-game. It is clearly too strong to say that his position of relative non-involvement means that he no longer understands the concept of pain, but in some much more subtle way he no longer uses the concept as we do; the words 'He's in pain' no longer mean for him what they mean to us. Disconnected from the normal context of responsive relations with others, the concept is deprived of the vast mesh of practical and conceptual links which depend upon our involvement with the other. Wittgenstein believes it is impossible to describe the difference between these two uses of the concept clearly, or even to say whether we have one concept or two. The case of someone who is indifferent to the pain of others is analogous to one in which someone identifies two possible applications of the duck-rabbit, but never sees the picture now as a duck, now as a rabbit.

Would we say such a person understands the concept of an ambiguous picture in the way we do? Wittgenstein's extended discussion of aspect-blindness and meaning blindness may be seen as an exploration of these question; that is, as an attempt to get clear about what it means to inhabit our language.<sup>7</sup> What I have tried to focus on is the way in which our manner of inhabiting it is inimical to sceptical doubt about others, as a means to bringing out that the unliveability of scepticism about others minds is untouched by the relative uncertainty of our everyday judgements about others.

### VIII

Up to now we have principally been concerned with the relation between the doubt which occurs, on particular concrete occasions, within our ordinary language-game and sceptical doubt. In this section, I want to turn to the discussion of the third strand in Wittgenstein's remarks, namely the idea that there is a general uncertainty that characterises this region of our language, and which makes the assertion that you can never know what is going on inside another seem apt. This general uncertainty of the game is, for Wittgenstein, a feature of its grammar, and, as I've already emphasised, it is to be carefully distinguished from the practical doubt that arises in particular concrete circumstances. Wittgenstein is concerned to identify what this grammatical uncertainty of the game amounts to: what is it about the way our psychological concepts function that makes the description of the game as uncertain appropriate? There are a number of characteristic features of our use of these concepts to which his remarks draw our attention. First of all, the fact that we use these concepts on the basis of our perceiving certain patterns in behaviour and its circumstances, means there is inevitably a degree of vagueness in their application:

If a pattern of life is the basis for the use of a word then the word must contain some amount of indefiniteness. The pattern of life, after all, is not one of exact regularity.

(LW 1 211)

[M]ustn't any concept simply of behaviour be formulated imprecisely if it is more or less to serve the game with such concepts?

(LW 1 247)

Sufficient evidence [for pretence] passes over into insufficient without a borderline. A natural foundation for the way this concept is formed is the complex nature and the variety of human contingencies.

(RPP 2 614)

The pattern of human life just is unpredictable and irregular, and the concepts that we use to characterise human behaviour must be ones that can pick out patterns within this constant variation. There must be both a complexity and a degree of play in our concepts that allows for the fact that they do not apply in circumstances of mechanical or straightforward repetition; concepts that operate in the ‘flux’ – or ‘bustle’ – of life must be ‘elastic’, if they are to be usable.

Thus, we cannot state clear, determinate criteria for someone’s feeling grief or joy or irritation, because what constitute the criteria on the basis of which we apply these concepts necessarily vary in different cases: between different individuals, and between all the different sorts of circumstances in which these feelings arise. Not only that, but our criteria relate not simply to an action or expression viewed in isolation, but to an action or expression as it is seen against the background of ‘the whole hurly burly’ of human life and relationships. This kind of indefiniteness in our criteria means that these concepts are quite unlike, for example, concepts of disease or other physical states of the human body. It may be very hard, in the case of the former, to say just what it is that prompts our describing a particular case in the way we do: ‘“evidence” here includes “imponderable” evidence’ (PI 228). Consequently, it may be difficult to persuade someone else of the correctness of our description; the uncertainty of the evidence goes along with the possibility for disagreement in concrete cases. However, not only is this kind of grammatical uncertainty unconnected with any form of sceptical doubt, Wittgenstein also points out that it doesn’t follow from it that we are always uncertain. Thus: ‘[t]here is an *unmistakeable* expression of joy and its opposite’ (LW 2 32); ‘[t]here *are* cases where only a lunatic could take the expression of pain, for instance, as a sham’ (LW 2 33). The general uncertainty of the game which arises from an essential elasticity in our concepts does not mean that there is no such thing as unambiguous evidence, or that we are *never* certain, or that there is *never* agreement in a concrete case.

The grammatical uncertainty which characterises our ordinary language-game is also connected with the fact that its conceptual possibilities include that of another’s thoughts and feelings being hidden from me in a variety of different ways. Not all of these involve an idea of deceit. For example, it just is standardly the case that, although the other does nothing to hide his thoughts or intentions, we cannot usually guess his thoughts or intentions before he utters them. Thus, if I see someone I do not know leaving his house, then I will normally have no idea what his intention is. If someone speaks his thoughts aloud, but in a language I don’t understand, then what he thinks will remain hidden to me. If someone’s cultural background is quite different from mine, then I may be unable to interpret his gestures and facial expressions; I may feel that the other is ‘a closed book’ to me. In the same way, lack of a shared background may result in my being misled by what the other says or does, even in circumstances where it is his intention to make everything as

clear as possible. There are, moreover, many different reasons that another may have for hiding what he really thinks or feels from me, or for pretending to thoughts and feelings that he doesn't really have.

All these features of our ordinary use of psychological concepts introduce an essential uncertainty into the language-game, which we sum up in the picture of the other's thoughts and feelings as being 'inside' him. Although the picture is a natural one, we must be careful, Wittgenstein believes, not to let a misapplication of it lead us into misunderstanding. For it is not literally the case that the other's thoughts and feelings are 'inside' him, or that our failure of knowledge is due to the fact that we only see the outside, but rather that, for one reason or another, I am not in a position to read the situation accurately or in detail. Thus, in unproblematic cases – e.g. when someone is in evident pain, when I recognise and trust the other, when the other is transparent to me – I do not think, 'All the same his feelings are hidden from me': '[w]hen mien, gesture and circumstances are unambiguous, then the inner seems to be the outer; it is only when we cannot read the outer that an inner seems to be hidden behind it' (LW 2 63). What Wittgenstein is trying to get us to see is that '[i]t is not the relationship of the inner to the outer that explains the uncertainty of the evidence, but rather the other way around – this relationship is only a picture-like representation of this uncertainty' (LW 2 68). Thus, the idea of the inner is a picture-like representation of a certain aspect of the grammar of our language-game, and not a specification of a defining property of mental states.

So far, we have focused on grammatical features of our ordinary language-game that relate to the nature of the evidence on the basis of which our concepts are applied; that is, we have been looking at the forms of indefiniteness which characterise the way the other is presented to me. However, there is also a grammatical indefiniteness in the game connected with the fact that it functions in the context of our involvement with others and is therefore subject to the effect of variations in individual response. We saw earlier how Wittgenstein's discussion of seeing aspects is used to draw our attention to the fact that we do not merely see that the other is in pain, but our involvement with the other – our immediate emotional and behavioural orientation towards him – means that the other's suffering lives for us, that we are engaged and occupied with it, that it takes hold of us. What I want to bring out now is that once we see how our ordinary use of psychological concepts is played out within this context of mutual involvement, then we can also recognise how individual variations in degree of attentiveness, or in response, to others will result in discrepancies in how we describe what we see. Such variations may be the result of differences in character or temperament (I'm observant, he is not; he is trustful, I'm not), or of disparities in past experience, or of better or wider knowledge, and so on. Again, the point is that these variations will be reflected in disagreements in judgements which cannot necessarily be resolved by appeal to the evidence. This feature

of the game is once again essentially connected with a kind of indefiniteness which makes the description of it as ‘uncertain’ seem apt.

All this clearly indicates that Wittgenstein is everywhere anxious to emphasise a profound asymmetry between our psychological language-game and the language-game of physical description. To the extent that Cavell’s discussion of privacy can be read as an expression of his sense of the fundamental difference between psychological concepts and those which we use to characterise physical objects, it can be seen as voicing a central theme of Wittgenstein’s remarks. However, in so far as it attempts to characterise this difference by reference to an asymmetry *vis-à-vis* the philosophical sceptic, it goes against the grain of Wittgenstein’s thought. Thus, I have argued that, here as elsewhere, Wittgenstein’s main concern is with a diagnosis that reveals, not only the peculiarity of the scene in which the philosopher’s doubt is expressed, but also the difficulty of our giving any real sense to the question he appears to ask. The uncertainty of our ordinary psychological language-game does not put us in a weaker position when it comes to this task of diagnosis, but it makes the task more difficult, or more complex, than it would otherwise be. For in exposing the emptiness of the philosopher’s words we must not be led, as Malcolm is, into falsifying or misrepresenting the distinctively indefinite and uncertain character of our language-game. The crucial thing is to capture the indefiniteness of the language-game while revealing that it is essentially hostile to the doubts of the philosophical sceptic.

## IX

I come, finally, to the question whether Wittgenstein believes that the uncertainty which characterises our language-game has any sort of metaphysical significance. Is the uncertainty of our language-game explained by some idea of the metaphysical separateness of self and other? Or does Wittgenstein believe that here, as elsewhere, the game is simply as it is; that how it is cannot be explained, or underpinned, by anything outside it? The following remark indicates quite clearly that the latter is the case:

‘The *uncertainty* as to whether another person is in pain’ – is it based on the fact that he is he and I am I? (But just ask yourself: ‘Can he know it? He doesn’t have any object of comparison.’) No, *here* I’m deceived by a picture. The uncertainty is a matter of the particular case, and the concept vacillates from one case to another. But that is our game – we play it with an *elastic* tool.

(LW 1 243)

Thus, there is the uncertainty that arises on particular occasions, motivated by specific aspects of the concrete situation, and there is the indefiniteness

that characterises the grammar of our concepts. Neither of these is explained by, or grounded in, ‘the fact that he is he and I am I’. If we are tempted to think that this indefiniteness is essential in some more profound sense than that it characterises the grammar of *our* concepts, then Wittgenstein suggests that we have only to think of some facts of nature being different, to see that this is not the case. It is true that ‘in the flux of life, where all our concepts are elastic, we couldn’t reconcile ourselves to a rigid concept’ (LW 1 246). However, if we imagine people whose behaviour is much more regular than ours, whose range of expressions is limited to the unambiguous signs of a restricted set of emotions, whose responses are uniform, and who never dissemble or deceive, then we can begin to imagine a language-game that is very different from ours. Not only would their concepts be more rigid and more simple than ours, but they would have no occasion to feel uncertainty, or to disagree, about their application. In such a case, Wittgenstein suggests, ‘They would say: “Should I be uncertain because he is he and I am I? What in the world do you mean?”’ (LW 1 245).

### Notes

- 1 See Cavell 1979 Part One.
- 2 Thus: ‘that so-and-so is the criterion of *y* is a matter, not of experience, but of “definition”... The satisfaction of the criterion of *y* establishes the existence of *y* beyond question’ (Malcolm 1968: 84).
- 3 Cavell’s claim that we are not in a position to reject scepticism about other minds is not intended to be incompatible with the claim that ‘the soul (of the other) is there to be seen... my relation to the other’s soul is as immediate as to an object of sight’ (Cavell 1979: 368).
- 4 A concept that had only a third-person application would not, therefore, be equivalent to one part of our concept; it would be a different, though related, concept.
- 5 This way of making the contrast between real doubt and the sceptic’s doubt mirrors the distinction Cavell makes, in his discussion of external world scepticism, between a concrete knowledge claim and the philosopher’s example of a claim. The latter is not a specific claim made on a specific basis, but is an imaginary claim made in a ‘non-claim context’. See Cavell 1979 Ch. 8.
- 6 The idea that the philosopher’s abstracted use of our words drains them of their meaning is central to Cavell’s critique of the external world sceptic. In general, I am suggesting that we should see a much closer parallel between Cavell’s diagnosis of external world scepticism and Wittgenstein’s attitude to the sceptic about other minds. The aim in both cases is to realise, on the one hand, the way in which the concrete doubts that occur within our ordinary language-game are a way of inhabiting the human world, and on the other, that the sceptic’s attempt to put the latter in doubt results in something that has only the illusion of meaning.
- 7 See PI, Part II, Section xi; RPP 1; RPP 2; LW 1.

# SCEPTICISM AND TRAGEDY

## Crossing Shakespeare with Descartes

*Anthony Palmer*

### 1 Introduction

In Cavell's justifiably influential essay on *King Lear*, 'The Avoidance of Love', we find the following.

In the unbroken tradition of epistemology since Descartes and Locke (radically questioned from within itself only in our period), the concept of knowledge (of the world) disengages from its connections with matters of information and skill and learning, and becomes fixed to the concept of certainty alone and in particular to a certainty provided by the (by my) senses. At some early point in epistemological investigations the world normally present to us (the world in whose existence, as it is typically put, we 'believe') is brought into question and vanishes, whereupon all connection with a world is found to hang upon what can be said to be 'present to the senses'; and that turns out, shockingly, not to be the world. It is at this point that the doubter finds himself cast into scepticism, turning the existence of the external world into a problem.

(Cavell 1976: 323)

This was published in 1969. Roughly twenty years later, we find the following in the introduction to his *Disowning Knowledge in Six Plays of Shakespeare*:

My intuition is that the advent of scepticism as manifested in Descartes' *Meditations* is already in full existence in Shakespeare, from the time of the great tragedies in the first years of the seventeenth century, in the generation preceding Descartes. However strong the presence of Montaigne and Montaigne's scepticism in various of Shakespeare's plays, the sceptical problematic I have in mind is given its philosophical refinement in Descartes' way of raising questions of God's existence and the immortality of the soul . . .

The issue posed is no longer, or not alone, as with earlier scepticism, how to conduct oneself in an uncertain world; the issue suggested is how to live at all in a groundless world.

(Cavell 1987: 3)

The claim, then, is that ‘tragedy is the working out of a response to scepticism’ and that the scepticism of which it is a working out is the scepticism which is given its definitive statement in Descartes’ *Meditations*. More recently, Cavell has characterised this conception of tragedy as arising from the notion of presence generated by the ‘crossing of Shakespeare with Descartes’ (Cavell 1994: 115). On the basis of this hypothesis or guided by this intuition, he has produced distinctive and compelling readings of Shakespearean tragedy. In particular, the reading of *King Lear* which started the enterprise and the reading of *Othello* introduced in part 4 of *The Claim of Reason* which followed it, have made it well nigh impossible, for me at least, to read those two plays in what might be called the orthodox way.

Yet despite the persuasiveness of Cavell’s reading of these plays, his crossing of Shakespeare with Descartes remains problematic. It is not just that it is difficult to shake off the suspicion of anachronism that it arouses, for it may well be that while, so far as I know, there is no evidence whatsoever that Descartes actually read any of Shakespeare’s plays, and Shakespeare certainly could not have read any of Descartes’ writings, nevertheless Descartes may well have been writing within the same sceptical climate as Shakespeare wrote his plays. Indeed the textbook presentation of the origin and development of Descartes’ philosophy is to see it as a reaction to the scepticism of the sixteenth century epitomised in the writings of Montaigne. In that tradition Descartes’ original presentation of the sceptical problem is generally taken to be no more than an extreme version of the scepticism found in Montaigne whose work was certainly known to Shakespeare. Yet there remain two further reasons for thinking of Cavell’s hypothesis or intuition as problematic despite the persuasiveness of his reading of the plays.

The first is that there is a strong case to be made in favour of the view that it was the rapid absorption of Descartes’ conception of human nature into the English philosophical tradition, beginning with Locke’s *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, together with the sceptical problems it inherited, which led to the standard reading of the plays which Cavell rejects. The second is that it is becoming increasingly clear that the scepticism which Shakespeare certainly knew from his reading of Montaigne, Pyrrhonian scepticism, was quite different from the scepticism which Descartes sought to overcome in the *Meditations*, and moreover, that our inability to recognise the difference has largely been occasioned by the reading of Sextus Empiricus’s writings from the perspective of Cartesian and post-Cartesian philosophy.<sup>1</sup> If we remain convinced by Cavell’s reading of the plays these reasons might lead us to conjecture that the sceptical background needed to make sense of them is precisely not that of Descartes but that of Montaigne.

## 2 Locke's *Essay* and readings of Shakespeare

If we seek to characterise the scepticism of the *Meditations* we could hardly escape pointing out, as indeed Cavell himself does, that it is scepticism about the existence of an *external world* and that that scepticism itself depends upon a conception of an *internal world* to which it is impossible to extend sceptical doubt. The first person methodology of the First Meditation – ('Some years ago I was struck ...', 'Whatever I have up till now accepted ...', 'As if I were not a man who sleeps at night ...', 'Suppose then that I am dreaming ...', 'And yet firmly rooted in my mind ...', 'I will suppose then not that God ... but rather some malicious demon ...', 'I shall consider myself as not having hands or eyes ... etc.), was, with hindsight, bound to lead to the conclusion that the 'I am' which I cannot doubt will inevitably generate the conclusion that 'I am what I cannot doubt myself to be'. This is how Descartes' methodological doubt led to his conception of himself as a doubting (and therefore a thinking) thing and his new conception of what thinking is which was to bedevil philosophy for the next three hundred years and to become, as Cavell observes, 'radically questioned from within itself only in our period'. Yet it is this very bedevilling which should already begin to make us sceptical of Cavell's 'intuition' that Cartesian scepticism, i.e. scepticism about an *external world*, 'is already in full existence in Shakespeare'.

Subsequent attempts by philosophers to improve upon Descartes' own way of bridging the gap between the knowledge we cannot fail to have of our own minds and the knowledge we would like to have, but seemingly cannot have, of other things, have been the bread and butter of the subject we know as epistemology. But this new conception of what we are, i.e. that we are *thinking* things, also had its effect upon conceptions of poetry and particularly so on English poetry. It is worthwhile reminding ourselves how this came about.

The conception of mind which Descartes introduced into philosophy first entered the English speaking tradition through the work of John Locke. In his hands it became the doctrine of *consciousness* as the defining characteristic of the mental and the basis of personal identity:

To find wherein personal identity consists, we must consider what *person* stands for; which, I think, is a thinking intelligent being that has reason and reflection and can consider itself as itself, the same thinking thing in different times and places; which it does only by that consciousness which is inseparable from thinking, and, as it seems to me, essential to it: it being impossible for anyone to perceive without perceiving that he does perceive.

(Locke 1979 (1689): 335)

Locke reserved the word 'idea' for what we are, in this sense, conscious of, effectively reversing the sense of 'shared knowledge' which the word previ-

ously enjoyed. Moreover, he was well aware of the epistemological problem which this conception of ‘ideas’ seemed to pose. i.e. the problem of the existence of a world beyond our own ‘ideas’ – the problem of the existence of an *external* world – in short, Descartes’ sceptical problem:

Tis evident the mind knows not things immediately but only by the intervention of the ideas it has of them. Our knowledge therefore is real only in so far as there is a conformity between our ideas and the reality of things. But what shall here be the criterion? How shall the mind when it perceives nothing but its own ideas know that they agree with things themselves?

(ibid.: 563)

This was the problem it seemed to pose. Unlike Descartes, however, Locke does not seek a solution in some grand God-based metaphysics but, in what was to become the characteristically British philosophical way, tackles the problem piecemeal according to the various categories of ideas he had distinguished. Locke aimed to show that with regard to most of our ideas the sceptical problem which Descartes had bequeathed does not arise. In fact, he argued, it only arises with regard to one category of ideas, namely our ideas of substances. ‘Even the meanest plant’ he insisted ‘confounds the most enlarged understanding’. With regard to them we just have to accept this fact together with whatever consequences followed from it with regard to scientific investigations. With regard to all of our other ideas, however, no such problem exists. They do, though, present their own dangers. With regard to the simple ideas we have of the qualities of bodies, while we might be inclined to think of some (what he calls the secondary qualities, i.e. colours, sounds, tastes, etc.) as resembling the qualities of the bodies themselves which produce them in us, we are just wrong about that and should guard against doing so. With regard to other simple ideas of the qualities of bodies, what he calls the primary or original qualities, he thinks it is obvious they cannot but resemble the qualities which produce them in us. But that problem does not arise with regard to the huge category of ideas he calls modes. Modes, since they:

are archetypes of the minds own making, not intended to be copies of anything, nor referred to the existence of any things as to their originals cannot want any conformity necessary to real knowledge. For that which is not designed to represent anything but itself can never be capable of wrong representation nor mislead us from the true apprehension of anything by its dislikeness to it.

(ibid.: 564)

Modes do present us with a problem, however, and it was this problem

which led to a conception of poetry which reached its epitome in the criticism of Dr Johnson. The problems which Locke saw the category of ideas which he called modes generated was not a problem of knowledge but of language or communication. The problem is not one of the agreement of ideas with things but one of the agreement of the ideas to which one person attaches a name and the ideas to which another person might attach the same name.

These complex ideas of modes when they are referred by the mind, and intended to correspond to the ideas in the mind of some other intelligent being expressed by the names we apply to them, they may be very deficient, wrong and inadequate because they agree not to that which the mind designs to be their archetype and pattern . . . but this refers more to proper speaking than knowing aright.

(*ibid.*: 378)

It was this problem that both Locke and Johnson thought could be solved by 'observation and industry . . . laid out in the search of the true and precise meaning of names' (*ibid.*: 480). Locke was inclined to think that the dictionary that would be produced by such observation and industry would require too much industry ever to be produced. Johnson, however, supplied it. 'Dictionary Johnson' in this way continued the underlabourer's task of 'clearing ground little and of removing some of the rubbish that lies in the way to knowledge' which Locke saw as his own philosophical pursuit in his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. Johnson too saw himself as 'the pioneer of literature doomed only to remove rubbish and clear obstructions from the paths of learning and genius' (Johnson 1979 (1755): 301).

Now there is no doubt that Johnson's labours on the dictionary and his literary criticism are closely related enterprises. His celebrated remark about the so-called metaphysical poets, and in particular the poetry of John Donne, that it 'consists of heterogeneous ideas yoked by violence together' is a direct product of Locke's conception of words and ideas which was in turn Locke's inheritance from Descartes. The whole of Johnson's essay on the life of Cowley from which that phrase comes should be viewed as an exercise in criticism within Locke's way of 'ideas', which, as we have seen, is his version of Descartes' *res cogitans*. Criticism for Johnson became highly concentrated on the proper use of words. We get our speaking clear by getting our thinking clear. Farewell the so-called metaphysical poets.

More importantly, however, with regard to Cavell's 'crossing of Shakespeare and Descartes', this new way of ideas and words generated a reading of Shakespeare's tragedies which is precisely the reading which Cavell wishes to oppose. It became the orthodox view.

Descartes' conception of human beings as essentially thinking things, together with the new conception of thinking it involved, had the effect of forcing a view of human beings as related to other people and other things

as thinkers to things thought about. In our dealings with the world around us and in particular in dealings with other people, with the exception of our thinking about substances, we have the capacity to get things right. What requires explanation is not getting things right but getting things wrong. Once the new *way of ideas* had taken hold there was a need for an explanation of error. This was Descartes' own startling realisation as he began the Fourth Meditation.

I know by experience that there is in me a faculty of judgement which, like everything else which is in me, I certainly received from God. And since God does not wish to deceive me, he surely did not give me the kind of faculty which would ever enable me to go wrong while using it correctly.

There would be no further doubt on this issue were it not that what I have just said appears to imply that I am incapable of ever going wrong . . . But when I turn back to myself, I know by experience that I am prone to countless errors.

(Descartes 1986 (1641): 37–8)

His solution was to distinguish between the Will and the Intellect in such a way that error is always a function of the Will and never a function of the Intellect. So when we go wrong in our thinking, when we make mistakes, we must look to the will and the influences on the will, rather than to the intellect to account for it. This account of error again was taken up by Locke with his doctrine of degrees of assent (together with its disarmingly common-sense sounding precept that we should not entertain 'any proposition with greater assurance than the proofs it is built upon will warrant' (Locke 1979 (1689): 697)), and was scarcely questioned in the British philosophical tradition until Cardinal Newman's *The Grammar of Assent*. Even then it was largely ignored. Indeed it is difficult to think of what other account of error could be given if Descartes' and Locke's account of consciousness or thinking is taken as the starting point.

When we read Shakespearean tragedies from the perspective of Descartes' and Locke's conception of human nature it is hard to avoid the standard readings. And so the tragedy of *King Lear* came to be seen as resulting from the error which Lear makes with regard to the love of his three daughters, and our understanding of the play becomes infected by whatever hypothesis or set of hypotheses we invoke to explain it; while the tragedy of *Othello* came to be seen as resulting from Othello's mistaken belief that Desdemona is unfaithful to him. In the case of *Othello*, however, the source of the error is supposed to be immediately apparent: namely, the machinations of the evil Iago. However, both of these explanations of the influences on the will which lead to the fatal error fail to convince, as Cavell so persuasively argues. The power of the tragedy of *King Lear* is not enhanced but diminished if

we have to resort to the hypothesis of Lear's puerility or senility to explain the mistake, made in the second scene of the play, from which such tragic consequences are to unfold. It is perhaps just this new conception of human nature which led to the popularity of Natham Tate's changed ending of which Johnson so approved.<sup>2</sup> Without the change the end is out of all proportion to the supposed beginning. Again, as Cavell so persuasively argues, the power of the tragedy of *Othello* is not enhanced but diminished if we are obliged to conclude that Othello moves from complete trust in Desdemona to complete lack of it on the slender evidence of a handkerchief.

This, then, is the paradox which should make us feel uncomfortable about Cavell's intuition that Cartesian scepticism is fully in place in Shakespeare's tragedies. That scepticism is a product of the theory of human nature which arose out of Descartes' method, which left him with a distinction between an *internal* world about which each of us in his own case cannot be in doubt and an *external* world which must, from that starting point, permanently elude us. Yet that theory of human nature, as it was absorbed into the English speaking tradition of philosophy, largely as a result of Locke's efforts, generated the reading of the plays which he wishes to oppose. If we remain convinced by the reading of the plays presented by Cavell and wish to retain the idea that these plays are a response to scepticism then we need to radically rethink the conception of scepticism to which they are a response.

### 3 Montaigne's Pyrrhonian scepticism

As I have already noted, Cavell abruptly dismisses the influence of Montaigne's scepticism on Shakespeare while acknowledging Montaigne's undeniable influence on Shakespeare's work. That scepticism had been appropriated from the account given by Sextus Empiricus in his *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*. Now anyone seeking to come to terms with the nature of that scepticism needs first of all to be wary of the way it has been read precisely as a result of Descartes' success in persuading us to think in terms of an *internal* and an *external* world. Once we have become persuaded of that distinction then talk about the distinction between appearance and reality can seem to be merely a different way of making the same point. So that when the Pyrrhonists urged us to stay within the appearances and suspend judgement as to the nature of reality, it became natural to think of this as an expression of our inability to get beyond the scepticism of Descartes' First Meditation. Appearances became the inner and reality the outer. From that point of view, staying within the appearances was not an option. Scepticism could not be a way of life to be advocated, as it was for the Pyrrhonists, but inevitably turned into a problem to be overcome; it became, in Kant's words 'a scandal to philosophy' that the existence of an external world cannot be demonstrated. The real scandal, however, was, perhaps, the ease and speed with which the distinction between an *internal* and an *external* world had been

absorbed into post-Cartesian philosophy, replacing the distinction between Appearance and Reality with which the Pyrrhonists struggled.

The distinction which preoccupied the classical sceptics, in the way in which the distinction between an internal and an external world has preoccupied modern philosophy, is symbolically captured in Plato's analogy of the divided line in which the great division is presented as that between the world of Phenomena and the world of Forms, the world as it appears to us and the world as it really is. But for Plato the world as it appears to us was not an *internal* as opposed to an *external* world. It included illusions and shadows but it also included the ordinary things we take to surround us, coloured things and shaped things, things which made sounds and gave off smells, things close to us and things far away. Of these things we have opinions and beliefs but not knowledge. The business of the philosopher, though, is knowledge which can only be of the Forms. His task is to escape from the world of Appearances to the world of Forms. Philosophical enquiry involves going beyond the Appearances. It was this idea of philosophical enquiry which was attacked both by Aristotle and by the classical or original sceptics. For Aristotle the task of the philosopher was to 'save the appearances' and for the classical sceptic the task was to stay within, and not seek to go beyond, the appearances.

In a powerfully written and argued chapter in *The Fragility of Goodness* entitled 'Saving Aristotle's appearances' Martha Nussbaum pays tribute to G.E.L. Owen's original insight that:

not only in the ethical works but also in *Physics*, *De Caelo*, and other scientific works Aristotle's *phainomena* must be understood to be our beliefs and interpretations often as revealed in linguistic usage. To set down the *phainomena* is not to look for a belief-free fact but to record our usage and the structure which usage displays.

(Nussbaum 1987: 244)

She argues that this conception of 'appearances' has general application in Aristotle's writings.

This, I suggest, is the meaning of Aristotle's talk of *phainomena*. It is a loose notion, one that invites and receives further subdivisions; but it is neither ambiguous nor vacuous . . . When Aristotle sits on the shore of Lesbos taking notes on shellfish, he will be doing something that is not, if we look at it from his point of view, so far removed from his activity when he records what we say about *akrasia*. He will be describing the world *as it appears to*, as it is experienced by, observers who are members of our kind.

(ibid.: 245)

The great antithesis between Plato's conception of philosophical enquiry and that of Aristotle was that the former thought that it required us to go beyond our ordinary ways of thinking and speaking, while the latter insisted that we must stay within them. For Plato, while he held to the theory of Forms, the result of philosophical enquiry will be something new, something literally extraordinary, i.e. not to be found within the ordinary, and it is valuable just because of that. It is something that will change our view of things. For Aristotle, however, philosophical enquiry will not result in something new and therefore extraordinary but it will enable us to command a clear view of our ordinary ways of thinking and speaking and thus enable us to avoid the puzzles and paradoxes which lack of such a clear view is liable to engender, and therein lies its value. The difference in the conception of philosophical enquiry between the two great philosophers of antiquity has its echoes in the twentieth century in the difference between the views of Russell and Wittgenstein. Russell in his 'Lectures on Logical Atomism' argued that 'the point of philosophy is to start with something so simple as not to seem worth stating and to end with something so paradoxical that no one will believe it' (Russell 1956: 193). Contrast this with Wittgenstein's claim in the *Investigations* that philosophy 'leaves everything as it is' (PI 124).

If the battle is between the pursuit of the new and the defence of the ordinary, the argumentative onus rests with the defence. Aristotle needs to show that there is something wrong with the attempt to go beyond the appearances. It is here that he takes what should have been seen as the decisive step. Moreover it is a step which is absorbed and codified by the classical sceptics. Instead of seeking to show that the claims Plato wishes to make about knowledge being of the Forms and that it is to knowledge of the Forms that philosophical enquiry should aspire are false, he does something quite different. He argues that such claims are not so much false as empty. I want to suggest that this decisive step is also what guides the Pyrrhonists as they are portrayed in the work of Sextus.

The decisive step is taken when Aristotle in the *Metaphysics* distinguishes between words that are *eso logos* and those which are *exo logos*; words which are said and meant and words which can be said but cannot be meant. Guy Robinson's recent book, *Philosophy and Mystification: A Reflection on Nonsense and Clarity* is a splendid illustration throughout of the importance of that Aristotelian distinction which effectively disappeared with the Cartesian transformation of modern philosophy. This is how he puts it:

Aristotle makes a crucial use of the distinction between 'mouthing' words with nothing behind them and words expressive of genuine beliefs in the very special sort of argument he brings against those, like Cratylus and the Heracliteans who profess to deny what he regards as the deepest principles of all – the law of contradiction and the law of the excluded middle . . . it is concerned to show that

the professed denials are only mouthed words, *exo logos* and cannot be *eso logos*.

(Robinson 1998: 14)

This special form of argument reappears in the *Posterior Analytics* at the point at which Aristotle appears to fulminate about the Platonic Forms. ‘So goodbye to the Platonic Forms’, he says, ‘they are *Teretismata* (meaningless noises) and have nothing to do with our speech’. This should not be taken, as Nussbaum does, as an uncharacteristic burst of ‘exuberant malice’ but as a characteristic deployment of the distinction which underlies his central criticism both of those who seek to deny the law of contradiction and those like Plato who seek to give their words an extraordinary reference, i.e. a reference beyond the appearances. Such attempted denials and purported references never succeed in saying anything at all. The sounds produced are empty. It is not that what is said is false, rather it is not yet a candidate for truth or falsity. The attempts do not make sense.

Now what I want to suggest is that it is this distinction between making sense and not making sense, which formed the basis of Aristotle’s attack on the way in which Plato sought to draw the distinction between appearance and reality, which was taken up by the Pyrrhonian sceptics. Its codification is the subject matter of Sextus Empiricus’s *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*. This was the scepticism which was finally appropriated by Montaigne. It was the scepticism which Shakespeare knew.

The codification of this Aristotelian form of argumentation in Sextus’s *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* is the compendium of modes which lead to the suspension of judgement. Sextus writes about the ten modes, the five modes, and the two modes. However, while the ten modes occupy most of the text, as indeed they do in their appropriation by Montaigne in his ‘Apology for Raymond Sebond’, and while they do still have the power, particularly in Montaigne’s presentation of them, to shake your faith in the power claimed for human reason, from the perspective of the form of Aristotelian argument which stresses the distinction between sense and nonsense, they really are only a preliminary. That form of argument only comes into play with the five modes and the two modes. The first of the five modes ‘based on discrepancy’ is in effect a generalised version of the original ten. Their aim is to generate or reveal disagreement about any claim about ‘things none evident’. Once you have generated or revealed that disagreement, the Aristotelian form of argument comes into play. It seeks to show that any attempt to solve the disagreement will inevitably fail, and fail in a particular way. It will either generate an infinite regress or result in a form of circular argument:

The later sceptics hand down five modes leading to suspension, namely these: the first based on discrepancy, the second on regress *ad infinitum*, the third on relativity, the fourth on hypothesis, the

fifth on circular reasoning. That based on discrepancy leads us to find that with regard to the object presented there has arisen both amongst ordinary people and amongst philosophers an interminable conflict because of which we are unable either to choose a thing or reject it, and so fall back on suspension. The mode based on regress *ad infinitum* is that whereby we assert that the thing adduced as a proof of the matter proposed needs a further proof, and this again another, and so on *ad infinitum*, so that the consequence is suspension, as we possess no starting point for our argument. The mode based upon relativity . . . is that whereby the object has such and such an appearance in relation to the subject judging and to the concomitant percepts, but as to its real nature we suspend judgment. We have the mode based upon hypothesis, when the dogmatists, being forced to recede *ad infinitum*, take as their starting point something which they do not establish by argument but claim to assume as granted simply and without demonstration. The mode of circular reasoning is the form used when the proof itself which ought to establish the matter of enquiry requires confirmation derived from that matter; in this case, being unable to assume either in order to establish the other, we suspend judgment about both.

(Sextus Empiricus 1990: 63)

It should be clear that all but the first of the five modes reduce to two, i.e. those which involve an infinite regress and those which involve circular reasoning. The third mode is really just a version of the first, and the fourth a version of the second. So we are left with the idea that when there is a discrepancy or disagreement, we can show that it cannot be resolved by either an infinite regress argument, or an argument that the purported resolution involves circular reasoning. And indeed the five are eventually reduced to two in the *Outlines*. This form of argument is perhaps most clearly brought out in a celebrated passage which presents the problem of a criterion of truth.

Besides, in order to decide the dispute which has arisen about the criterion, we must possess an accepted criterion by which we shall be able to judge the dispute; and in order to possess an accepted criterion, the dispute about the criterion must first be decided. And when the argument thus reduces itself to a form of circular reasoning, the discovery of the criterion becomes impracticable, since we do not allow them to adopt a criterion by assumption, while if they offer to judge the criterion by a criterion we force them to regress *ad infinitum*. And furthermore, since demonstration requires a demonstrated criterion, while the criterion requires an approved demonstration, they are forced into circular reasoning.

(Sextus Empiricus 1990: 101)

Now if we ask ourselves just what these two forms of argument show, it would be a mistake to say that they show that the claim under question is false. Rather, the conclusion is that they show that the claim in question is not yet a candidate for either truth or falsity, for it makes no sense. The infinite regress argument and the argument from circular reasoning are modes of showing that the words of the claim are not *exo* logos but *exo* logos; they are *teretismata* and have nothing to do with our speech. The sceptics ‘suspension of judgement’ is not the withholding of assent from something which is clearly understood but yet something about which we are unable to make up our minds with regard to its truth. It is rather something about which there can be no judgement at all. Our judgement is suspended or our assent withheld because ultimately there is nothing for us to judge or assent to. To say something, and not merely mouth words, we must stay within the Appearances.

This, then, was the scepticism which Montaigne appropriated from Sextus Empiricus. The sceptic, the enquirer, must confine himself to the appearances, to our ordinary ways of thinking and talking, on the pain of saying nothing at all. In the earthy manner in which the ‘Apology’ is written, Montaigne has his own way of making Aristotle’s *teretismata* point. He tells the following story.

In the midst of a discussion, and in the presence of his followers, Metrocles let off a fart. To hide his embarrassment he stayed at home until eventually, Crates came to pay him a visit; to his consolations and arguments Crates added the example of his own license; he began a farting match with him, thereby removing his scruples.

(Montaigne 1993: 658)

For Montaigne, the attempt to move beyond appearances generates not merely sounds in the air, as for Aristotle, but quite particular sounds in foul air! His scepticism is as far removed from its characterisation in the post-Cartesian period, i.e. from its characterisation in modern philosophy, as it is possible to be. It does not leave us, as Descartes thought at the end of the First Meditation, ‘like a prisoner who is enjoying an imaginary freedom while asleep’ who ‘dreads being woken up, and goes along with the pleasant illusion as long as he can’ (Descartes 1986 (1641): 15) nor like Hume towards the end of the First Book of the *Treatise* beginning to fancy himself ‘in the most deplorable condition imaginable, environ’d with the deepest darkness, and utterly depriv’d of the use of every member and faculty’ (Hume 1978 (1740): 269). The Pyrrhonian sceptic is not overcome by metaphysical ‘angst’: he has no metaphysical chips on his shoulders. He has, though, an angst about metaphysics and the dangers which pursuit of it engenders.

When we say that countless ages – ages past and ages yet to come – are but a moment to God and that God’s essence consists in good-

ness, wisdom, power, we utter words, but our intelligence cannot grasp the sense. Despite that, we in our arrogance, want to force God through human filters. All the raving errors that this world possesses are bred from trying to squeeze on to human scales weights far beyond their capacity.

(Montaigne 1993: 591)

The sceptic, the true enquirer, stays within the appearances, within the bounds of sense. He can say what he means just because he can mean what he says.

#### 4 Wittgenstein and scepticism

Since by far the most important background to Cavell's reading of Shakespeare's plays is the deep study he has made of Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*, I shall conclude with some remarks about Wittgenstein in relation to scepticism.

At Section 118 of the *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein asks 'Where does our investigation get its importance from, since it seems only to destroy everything interesting, that is, all that is great and important?' and responds by saying 'What we are destroying is nothing but houses of cards and we are clearing up the ground of language on which they stand.' Cavell himself has reminded us that Wittgenstein's German word *Luftgebaeude*, which is here translated as 'houses of cards', has the literal sense of 'houses of air'. It is impossible not to see in this the very same criticism which Aristotle raised against Plato's Forms and which Montaigne echoed in his own way. Only two sections before, at Section 116, he had already presented us with an illustration of his own resistance to going beyond what Aristotle would have called the appearances.

When philosophers use a word – 'knowledge', 'being', 'object', 'T', 'proposition', 'name' – and try to grasp the *essence* of the thing, one must always ask oneself; is the word ever actually used in this way in the language-game which is its original home? –

What *we* do is bring words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use.

When Wittgenstein wrote the *Investigations*, however, one major target for what would have been called sceptical forms of argumentation prior to Descartes had become prominent precisely as a result of Descartes' writings as absorbed into the English-speaking tradition via Locke. This was the distinction between the 'internal world' and the 'external world', which, I have suggested, usurped the Platonic distinction between appearance and reality which was the target for both Aristotle and the ancient sceptics. It

is the certainty we have of an internal world which renders knowledge of an external world, including our knowledge of 'other minds' problematic. In 1949, Gilbert Ryle, in his *The Concept of Mind*, could still refer to it as 'the official doctrine, which hails chiefly from Descartes' and he attacked it with just the forms of argument which had been deployed by the ancient sceptics, i.e. *reductio ad absurdum* arguments.<sup>3</sup>

In what has become known as 'the private language argument' Wittgenstein has commonly, and I think correctly, been taken to have demolished scepticism about other minds by demolishing, as Ryle sought to do, the conception of mind which is its starting point. The line of argument that has been abstracted from the *Investigations* might be put as follows. If our minds were as Descartes thought them to be, then not only the language we use to speak about them but the language we use to speak of anything at all would be a private language. However, when we try to think through this idea of a private language it turns out to be incoherent, and this generates the conclusion that our minds are not as Descartes thought them to be. Since it is Descartes' conception of mind which generates the problem of 'other minds' that problem has now, largely as a result of the work of Wittgenstein and Ryle, been dissolved. The problem is generated by an incoherent conception of the privacy of the mind and it disappears once that incoherence is recognised. It is Cavell's dissatisfaction with this line of argument which ultimately leads him to bring together the ideas of Cartesian scepticism, and Shakespeare's tragedies, i.e. to cross Shakespeare with Descartes.

Cartesian scepticism, the scepticism which Descartes wished to overcome in the *Meditations*, begins with privacy. I am what I cannot doubt myself to be. The inner is never in doubt in one's own case. With regard to it 'whatever seems to me to be the case will be the case'. In that sense, the inner is, to use Cavell's word, 'present' to me and only the inner is present to me. This is the point in epistemological investigation where 'the world normally present to us (the world in whose existence, as it is typically put, we "believe") is brought into question and vanishes'. If this is the point at which 'the doubter finds himself cast into scepticism, turning the existence of the external world into a problem', then if we are to cross Shakespeare with Descartes we need to see Shakespeare as occupying that Cartesian position, and the great tragedies unfolding from it. That option is not open to us, however, if we have been convinced that to conceive of the mind or the inner in such a way is not to conceive of anything at all, i.e. that it was just one of those 'houses of air' which Wittgenstein destroyed, and that it belongs where Ryle thought it belonged or Aristotle thought Plato's Forms belonged or where the sceptics thought anything beyond appearances belonged, i.e. nowhere. Yet that is what seemed to be the conclusion of the so-called Private Language Argument. Indeed it was precisely that conclusion which Norman Malcolm argued for in his paper 'The Privacy of Experience' (Malcolm 1967). It was Cavell's criticism of this in his paper 'Knowing and Acknowledging' (in

Cavell 1976) which formed the starting point for his crossing of Shakespeare with Descartes. If Wittgenstein's *Investigations* are to be invoked in order to clarify the intuition that 'the advent of scepticism as manifested in Descartes' *Meditations* is already in full existence in Shakespeare' we need to find a way of regarding the privacy of a private language as something more substantial than an airy nothing. And so Cavell begins his discussion of the relevant passages in the *Investigations* by pointing out that Wittgenstein 'does not say that there can be no private language'. Rather, Cavell reminds us, he raises the question as to whether we could imagine such a language, and 'the upshot of this question turns out to be that we cannot really imagine this, or rather that there is nothing of the sort to imagine, or rather that when we as it were try to imagine this we are imagining something other than we think' (Cavell 1979: 344). Now just how far this falls short of saying that there cannot be a private language is something about which there might be disagreement, but Cavell is surely correct when he concludes that the point Wittgenstein is making in asking and answering the question in the way in which he did was 'to illuminate something about the publicness of language, something about the depth to which language is agreed in' (Cavell 1979: 344).

Wittgenstein raises the question as to whether we can imagine a private language immediately after he had emphasised the importance of 'agreement in judgements' and not just 'agreement in definitions' if language is to be a means of communication. The sections usually taken to incorporate the private language argument occur immediately after the following three sections.

Disputes do not break out (among mathematicians, say) over the question whether a rule has been obeyed or not. People don't come to blows over it, for example. That is part of the framework on which the working of our language is based (for example in giving descriptions).

'So you are saying that human agreement decides what is true and what is false?' It is what human beings *say* that is true and false; and they agree in the language they use. That is not agreement in opinions but in form of life.

If language is to be a means of communication there must be agreement not only in definitions but also (queer as this may sound) in judgements. This seems to abolish logic, but does not do so. It is one thing to describe methods of measurement, and another to obtain and state results of measurement. But what we call 'measuring' is partly determined by a certain constancy in results of measurement.

(PI 240–2)

The importance of agreement in judgements may seem queer but the pas-

sages which follow, i.e. the passages which have been thought to be central to the so-called private language argument, have the effect of showing just how really queer it would be if we failed to realise their importance. Cavell, then is surely right to press this point.

There is however another set of remarks by Wittgenstein which can equally be regarded as attempts to 'illuminate something about the publicness of language' or the way 'we agree in the language we use' which can usefully be placed alongside the private language passages as a series of attempts to fill out the idea of agreement in judgements. These remarks are those that are published under the title of *On Certainty*. They begin, as the editors say in the preface, as comments on Moore's 'A Defense of Common Sense' which Wittgenstein had said was Moore's best article. Now 'A Defense of Common Sense' begins with Moore 'enunciating . . . a whole long list of propositions, which may seem, at first sight, such obvious truisms as not to be worth stating' (Moore 1925: 106). They are propositions about himself and his body and how he is related to other things including other people and other bodies around him. He says that 'they are, in fact, a set of propositions, every one of which (in my own opinion) I *know*, with certainty, to be true' (*ibid.*: 106). He then enunciates a proposition which makes reference to the first list of propositions which asserts '(what seems an obvious enough truism) that each of us . . . has frequently *known*, with regard to *himself* or *his body* . . . everything which, in writing down my list of propositions . . . I was claiming to know about *myself* or *my body*' (Moore 1925: 109). These judgements about ourselves, Moore claims, are ones in which we all agree.

What Wittgenstein does in *On Certainty* is treat these propositions which Moore claims to know with certainty as illustrating the agreement in judgements needed if language is to be a means of communication i.e. as illustrating the way in which we agree in the language we use. So he takes Moore to task for 'countering the assertion that one cannot know that, by saying "I do know it"'.

I may claim with passion that I know that this (for example) is my foot.

But this passion is after all something very rare, and there is no trace of it when I talk about this foot in the ordinary way.

Knowledge is in the end based on acknowledgement.

I say with passion 'I *know* that this is a foot' but what does it mean?

Every one of us often uses such a sentence and there is no question but that it makes sense. But does that mean it yields any philosophical conclusion? Is it more of a proof of the existence of external things that I know that this is a hand, than that I don't know whether this is gold or brass?

(OC 376–9, 388)

Now the reason for putting side by side Wittgenstein's remarks in *On Certainty* and the remarks from the *Investigations* usually taken to constitute the private language argument, as both seeking to illustrate the importance of agreement in judgements or the way in which 'we agree in the language we use', is that it should prevent us from assuming that the *only* way in which these can be neglected is in the modern tradition of scepticism that 'hails from Descartes'. That scepticism which begins with the internal – the original certainty we are supposed to have of the contents of our own minds – and ends by being scandalised or traumatised by our inability to gain knowledge of an external world including other minds, is indeed one way and, perhaps, since Descartes and Locke, the central way, in which the neglect of such agreement shows itself. When Wittgenstein seeks to articulate it by saying that 'knowledge is in the end based upon acknowledgement' thereby introducing the term which one commentator has described as Cavell's 'signature concept',<sup>4</sup> its importance is not restricted to the scepticism associated with moving from knowledge of an internal to knowledge of an external world. It does, of course have application to that but only because it is one of those ways in which philosophers have sought to go beyond – to take themselves outside the way we agree in the language we use. The concept of acknowledgement, and more particularly those concepts associated with its absence (denial, refusal, avoidance, etc.) are always available to be deployed at the point anyone seeks to go beyond those ordinary ways of speaking and behaving within which our words and thoughts make sense. They are capable of being invoked when Plato moved to his theory of Forms, when Cratylus sat wagging his finger when faced with the law of contradiction, and perhaps more importantly, as Montaigne thought, when wars are fought over words to which no sense can be attached. We should be grateful to Cavell for showing us how to read Shakespeare's tragedies with these concepts in mind. We can do so, however, without needing to invoke the intuition or hypothesis that the advent of scepticism as manifested in Descartes *Meditations* is already in full existence in Shakespeare.

### Notes

- 1 See, for example, Michael Frede's essays 'The Skeptic's Beliefs' and 'The Skeptic's Two Kinds of Assent and the Question of the Possibility of Knowledge' in Frede 1987.
- 2 Commenting on the Tate controversy, Johnson wrote 'In the present case the public has decided. *Cordelia* from the time of *Tate*, has always retired with victory and felicity. And if my sensations could add anything to the general suffrage, I might relate that I was many years ago so shocked by *Cordelia*'s death, that I know not whether I ever endured to read again the last scenes of the play till I undertook to revise them as an editor' (Johnson 1916: 161–2).
- 3 When you read Ryle's *The Concept of Mind*, it is difficult not to be struck by the form of argumentation which the Pyrrhonists too thought so important. In his inaugural lecture, entitled 'Philosophical Arguments', he insisted that 'a pattern

of argument which is proper and even proprietary to philosophy is the *reductio ad absurdum*'. The form of *reductio* that impressed him was the strong reduction which 'consists in deducing from a proposition or a complex of propositions consequences which are inconsistent with each other or with the original proposition. It shows (to express it in a fashion which will have to be amended later) that a proposition is illegitimate because it has logically absurd corollaries. The proposition under investigation is shown not to be merely false but nonsensical.' (Ryle 1971: 197). Chapter after chapter in *The Concept of Mind* can be seen to fit the Pyrrhonian form of argument as outlined by Sextus. It begins with the softening up procedure the aim of which is to induce disagreement with the view he proposes to demolish, and then moves swiftly to the employment of *reductio ad absurdum* arguments which effect the demolition.

4 Stephen Mulhall in Cavell 1996b: 46.

## REPLY TO FOUR CHAPTERS

*Stanley Cavell*

I accept with pleasure the privilege offered me of contributing to this volume by responding to four other contributions that variously and, for me, rewardingly, take up work of mine on Wittgenstein's response to scepticism.<sup>1</sup> The chapters of Anthony Palmer and Marie McGinn offer significant reservations concerning my views, Palmer's concerning my view of the quality or source of scepticism that I attribute to Shakespeare's tragedies, McGinn's on my sense of Wittgenstein's attitude towards scepticism. The chapters by Edward Minar and Andrea Kern are more concerned to articulate what my view of scepticism is – either, as in Minar's chapter, by differentiating various strands in the relation of material object and other minds scepticism, or, as in Kern's chapter, by placing and differentiating my view from related views. Because I am not pressed at the moment to respond to Minar's or to Kern's own articulations, which I find in the large companionable with my own, I shall spend the bulk of my intervention in response to Palmer's and to McGinn's reservations.

Palmer and I have evidently been down many similar pathways, and I agree with the importance he places on the need to be as clear as one can about the views of scepticism that I attribute to Shakespeare, to Descartes and to Montaigne, and which allow me to claim that 'the advent of scepticism as manifested in Descartes *Meditations* is already in full existence in Shakespeare . . . The issue posed is no longer . . . how to conduct oneself in an uncertain world [but] how to live at all in a groundless world' (quoted in Palmer, this volume: 260–1). But for all the interesting and important matters he raises in connection with Descartes and Locke and with Aristotle and Montaigne, I do not feel that I understand what he finds amiss with my various attributions of scepticism (granted their sketchiness, which is, graciously, not something that Palmer takes exception to).

I do not share Palmer's sense that 'it is difficult to shake off the suspicion of anachronism it arouses' (p. 261). That both Shakespeare and Descartes were serious readers of Montaigne is itself enough to link them on the point at issue. Palmer goes on to give two objections to my intuition of a sense of a new scepticism shared by Shakespeare and Descartes: first, that it was the

reception of Descartes through Locke that led in England to ‘the standard reading of the plays which Cavell rejects’; second, that ‘the scepticism which Shakespeare certainly knew from his reading of Montaigne, Pyrrhonian scepticism, was quite different from the scepticism which Descartes sought to overcome’.

About the first objection. That Descartes, through Locke, may have led to exactly ‘the standard view’ of Shakespeare that my reading of Descartes opposes, might be felt as an arresting irony, but it says so far nothing about whether my readings of passages of Descartes and of texts of Shakespeare are sound, or as sound as their competitors. Palmer takes as the standard view of the tragedy of *King Lear* that it results from the error Lear makes with regard to the love of his three daughters, and of the tragedy of *Othello* that it results from Othello’s mistaken belief that Desdemona is unfaithful to him (p. 265). Grateful as I am to Palmer for his praise of my readings of the plays, granting to me a reading in each case that ‘enhances’ rather than ‘diminishes’ the tragedy, I have to say that it doesn’t strike me that either of the standard readings he articulates depends upon any particular view of scepticism. Perhaps they depend upon some ready sense of a ‘flaw’ in the tragic hero. And my view is not exactly opposed to that ancient view of tragedy; it rather specifies what the flaw is, and why it dogs the human.

About the second objection. That Pyrrhonian scepticism is ‘quite different’ from that discovered in Descartes was, I took it, just my point. The difference I drew between them, quite explicit in the line that I cited above that Palmer quotes from me, is that Pyrrhonian scepticism can be, is meant to be, lived with, proposing a life saner than ordinary lives, with their disproportionate passions; whereas Cartesian scepticism cannot be lived with sanely, it must be denied, or some other relief from it found. It is just this difference that to begin with allowed me – no doubt somewhat over-excitedly – to go so far as to claim (the intuition) that the advent of scepticism in Descartes is already in full existence in Shakespeare. But ‘full existence’ was not to be taken to mean that Shakespeare already contained Descartes’ arguments. Indeed, that some new perspective might be opened upon what we find the important differences between literature and philosophy to be, was something I hoped my results suggested.

But perhaps Palmer takes it that, whatever scepticism may be attributed to Shakespeare’s texts, it is wrong to name it as Descartes’, since that name signifies a scepticism with respect to the external, as opposed to an internal world, and ‘it is this very bedevilling [of philosophy for the next three hundred years by this conception of the mind and its relation to the world] which should already begin to make us sceptical of Cavell’s “intuition” that Cartesian scepticism, i.e. scepticism about an *external world*, “is already in full existence in Shakespeare”’ (p. 262). Why is Palmer so sure that Shakespeare had no equivalent perception? Because it was not ‘the scepticism which Shakespeare knew from his reading of Montaigne’? But why

assume Shakespeare was incapable of going beyond what he read? (Palmer's is, no more than mine, an unargumentative view of Shakespeare's use of his 'sources'.) Shakespeare's tragic heroes are certainly bedevilled, and I came to follow out the idea that what they are bedevilled by is what Descartes, in his philosophical terms, will discover in his hyperbolic doubt. An uncanny (intuitive?) connection between these writers is that each moves from a gesture of asking for reassurance about the plainest of facts of their existence (too plain, as it were, to mention, that I am seated before a fire, that my angelic wife faithfully loves me) to experiencing that existence undermined to the point of madness.

Is it Palmer's idea that this connection cannot be right because Shakespeare *cannot* have in mind what Descartes discovered/invented only in the next generation as 'external world' scepticism, contrasted with an inner world in which doubt is defeated, defeats itself? (Later Palmer characterises the discovery as one of the privacy of the mind.) I might respond by remarking that this leaves out of consideration something to which I attach growing importance as Part Four of *The Claim of Reason* unpredictably develops, moving towards the figure of Othello as living out the fall into scepticism, requiring an increasing list of differences between material object scepticism and other minds scepticism. The significance of the differences is a function of what I call their asymmetrical relation to each other, carrying the implication that philosophy (in the Cartesian-influenced empirical development) had not steadily brought into view (until Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*) the singular characteristics of other-mind scepticism, which I sometimes describe, more colourfully (or intuitively?), as not having discovered the other as a philosophical problem. Not having discovered the problem, I mean, to the extent, say, that it is discovered, in the 'other' philosophical tradition after Kant, namely in Fichte and Hegel. (I have a number of times asked whether scholars of ancient philosophy find the problem, in its individuality, to be discovered in ancient classical philosophy, and the answer appears to be that they do not.) In *The Claim of Reason*, I say that Descartes 'passes' the singular issue of our knowledge of others (Cavell 1979: 482–3). I locate this moment in Descartes' third Meditation; and the implication of my reading of *Othello* is that the sceptical problem of the other, a generation before Descartes, is discovered there. (I don't say this happens there for the first time; I have suggested that it is discovered earlier in Shakespeare's sonnets.)

Then whether Shakespeare's discovery is to be 'crossed with' Descartes' may be said to depend on how one figures the connection of the distinction between the external and internal worlds with the distinction, let's say, between the material world and the world of mind. What Palmer figures as 'external' in Descartes is something inaccessible to *my* mind; but then Shakespeare's issue, as manifested in Othello's madness, is incontestably, in that sense, one of external scepticism. In showing the particular devasta-

tion of the sceptical temptation's fastening on an object other than ones philosophers characteristically adduce (that is, fastening on a beloved, not on a piece of wax or a hand or a house), Shakespeare offers, so one could say, a challenge to philosophy that it has, on our side of things, mostly declined. It was a challenge Descartes may have been the first to decline; in this sense one could say Shakespeare went beyond him. In fact, and in all seriousness, *The Claim of Reason* proposes a further connection between them.

My saying just now that Descartes passed by the problem of the other, or others, was importantly inexact. What he passed by I specify in the passage in question in *The Claim of Reason* as the problem of the existence of the finite other. Descartes famously, decisively, did not pass by the problem of the existence of God, the infinite other. What I say of Shakespeare's structure is that it shows 'the philosophical problem of the other as the trace or scar of the departure of God' (ibid: 470); a few pages later I say that this requires 'understanding how the other now bears the weight of God, shows me that I am not alone in the universe' (ibid: 482), and on the following page I quote words from the end of Descartes' third Meditation that summarise this argument for God's existence (the argument that nothing but God could have formed the idea of God I find stamped within me), or that summarise its consequence, namely 'that it would not be possible for my nature to be what it is, possessing the idea of a God, unless God really existed', and I claim that they fit the state Othello finds himself in with respect to Desdemona. I still find that it is not too much to describe this conjunction as showing that the Cartesian problematic is in full existence in Shakespeare. (Shakespeare's anticipation of philosophy should be no more surprising – or in need of understanding – as his placing his theatrical object of love in the homologous place of God.)

Can I prove the fit of Descartes' words with Othello's state? What I think is that to disprove it you have to read Shakespeare's play a different way. I wish to leave open the idea that a Cartesian 'privacy' bears on what is felt as Shakespeare's marking a new stage in human – Western? – subjectivity. And since I seek help from Wittgenstein in characterising this subjectivity, I am not likely to be amenable to the suggestion that Wittgenstein's 'private language argument' has 'demolished scepticism about other minds' (p. 273), if that means showed that the privacy of the mind is not, or did not become, or no longer is, a philosophical problem. It is hard to think of Descartes as discovering the inner. St Luke said that 'The Kingdom of God is within you.' The isolation of privacy is a further step, also of history as well as of philosophy. I claim in *The Claim of Reason* (Cavell 1979: 369) that 'The idea of privacy expressed in the fantasy of a private language fails to express how private we are'.

Where does this leave Montaigne's inheritance of Pyrrhonism? I cannot agree with Palmer's suggestion that Wittgenstein's defence of his destructiveness as destroying 'houses of cards' is 'the very same criticism which

Aristotle raised against Plato's Forms and which Montaigne echoed in his own way' (p. 272). A sufficient reason for refusing this identification is that Wittgenstein advances very specific ideas about how such 'structures of air' are formed and what shapes the forms take (e.g. the wish to speak outside language games, which produces the false need for super-orders of super-connections); and there is essentially no way to prevent these wishes and false needs from recurring. (Aristotle's evident relation to so-called ordinary language philosophy is reasonably clear in the case of Austin's work, who attests in his paper on excuses that it comes from reading Aristotle and Aristotle's critics – and not, I think, just on the subject of *akrasia*.) I have drawn the (well, drawn one) moral of *Philosophical Investigations* by saying: it is human to wish to reject the human. That *could* be a way to read the teaching of Montaigne, in its incessant examples of, let's say, human ignorance and folly and perverseness and vanity. This is, I suppose, why Montaigne makes an appearance at the close of *The Claim of Reason* in response to the reading of *Othello*. In that case, *Othello* is a kind of rebuke to Montaigne, a portrait of what Montaigne most deplores in the human, its horror of itself, a rebuke for underestimating a change of culture in which the classical way of overcoming excess, through (Pyrrhonian) suspension of judgement, has become unavailing. What has happened? Which means: what happens in modern scepticism that moves it from moderation in the face of endless uncertainty and ignorance to (how shall we formulate it, tentatively?) dissociation and denial and disappointment in the face of endless knowledge?

Marie McGinn, too, takes me to task for attributing to my reading of Wittgenstein a tolerance, even affirmation, of scepticism that seems to distort what she also grants as an insight of mine in being 'the first to draw attention to the prevalence of the theme of uncertainty in Wittgenstein's remarks' (see p. 240). Much as I would like to take credit for being the first to draw attention to something insufficiently noticed in Wittgenstein (essentially meaning in *Philosophical Investigations*), I was surprised at her description of what I had noticed; indeed I have some difficulty recognising it – along with the ensuing report of my views in the opening five pages of her chapter – as a description of what happens in my *Claim of Reason* (the principal text of mine that McGinn cites). This disheartens me, because I feel we agree in important part about Wittgenstein's achievements.

I begin with a word about certainty. While McGinn seems to agree with my questioning of the Malcolm (and Albritton) interpretation of the role of criteria in the *Investigations*, she evidently does not attach the importance I do to dissociating Wittgensteinian criteria from the idea of certainty, and I must assume this is because she persists in feeling that certainty is indeed what criteria must provide if they do what Wittgenstein means for them to do – well, perhaps she will concede (that Wittgenstein sees) that some uncertainty is built in to them, in some regions of our language, those dealing with psychological concepts, for example. This is more or less what I thought,

too, in beginning to study *Philosophical Investigations*. I seem to recall having spent about three years without a decent night's sleep feeling that Malcolm and Albritton could not be right (roughly because the dogmatism of logically necessary and sufficient criteria seemed to me as unresponsive to the tormented perplexity and complexity of the *Investigations* as the scepticism it was meant to turn aside would be) and that they must be right (since I had filled interminable pages with refutations of their views that wound me each time back into their corner).

The opening four chapters of *The Claim of Reason*, to go no further, are punctuated with attempts to characterise the sense of necessity captured in the Wittgensteinian idea of a criterion, 'a concept of necessity . . . not tied to the concept of certainty' (Cavell 1979: 40). I ask, for example, 'What is the source of the view that criteria are meant to establish the existence of something with certainty?' (ibid.: 37); and 'Criteria are "criteria for something's being so" [a phrase of Albritton's], not in the sense that they tell us of a thing's existence, but of something like its identity, not of its *being* so, but of its *being so*' (ibid.: 45). Part of the misunderstanding is, I imagine, that McGinn reads my denial of certainty to criteria to imply that I am suggesting something like the following, that they establish something's being so with a very high degree of certainty, with, as it were, a faintly bitter aftertaste in the sweet water of certainty. This was what I had to recover from in meeting Albritton's being forced (as I see it) to say that the presence of criteria (e.g. of toothache) 'can entail that [a person] *almost certainly* has a toothache'.<sup>2</sup> It is why I have to ask, early, what differences there are in the concept of knowledge as controlled by certainty and by criteria (ibid.: 16–17) and why, as a kind of climax of the chapter, I formulate the question 'What is disappointing about criteria?' (ibid.: 83). The question assumes the earlier result of the preceding pages that are meant to show, in effect, that it cannot be a good answer to the question to say 'Criteria fail to provide [pure] certainty'. (One might almost say that what is disappointing is certainty itself, as philosophy conceives it.)

My answer to the question is to cite 'the sorts of expressions in which Wittgenstein presents what I understand as the background against which our criteria do their work; even, make sense' (ibid.: 83). And then I cite, for example, 'What has to be accepted, the given, is – so one could say – *forms of life*' (PI 226); and 'What gives us *so much as the idea* that living beings, things, can feel?' (PI 283); and 'The human body is the best picture of the human soul' (PI 178) – mysterious, fascinating, for some maddening, strokes of articulation about which, it seems to me, two things should strike one (do strike me): first, they seem to capture our relation to the world and others (and ourselves) that are irreducible, primitive; second, to say of any of these formulations that they are *certain* is either laughably questionable or helplessly weak, I think both. I understand my efforts with respect to Wittgenstein's notion of criteria to wish to capture the sense in which they articulate the

all but unshakable depth of our hold on the world at the same time as they trace our vulnerability to the ways of that world. Scepticism, in its classical formulations, does, to my mind, neither.

It would be as true to say of the work of *The Claim of Reason* that it defends Wittgenstein's sense of certainty as much as it insists on the openness of criteria to surprise. I cite with pleasure and admiration his exchange on the subject, running: "But, if you are *certain*, isn't it that you are shutting your eyes in face of doubt?" – They are shut' (PI 224).<sup>3</sup> But they are, as I find the exchange suggests, human eyes, humanly shut. It is sometimes my responsibility to say so. It is as often my responsibility to bear the discovery that the world, as it were, failed to justify my trust. This bears on the issue of our disappointment in criteria. They seemed to promise me a measure, an unclouded perspective, say a real criterion, a rock on which to secure my conviction; instead they lock me into my responsibility for knowing, and for being known.

There is, I gather, a further reason for McGinn to raise the issue of a general uncertainty with respect to the application of psychological concepts to others, namely that Wittgenstein stresses the issue in his later writings on the philosophy of psychology. And now I have to repeat, even worsen, a confession I make in the Foreword to *The Claim of Reason*. I have not read beyond a few pages in Wittgenstein's work written after *Philosophical Investigations*. My undying, even growing, gratitude to the *Investigations* (Part I of which is the only work after the *Tractatus* that Wittgenstein prepared for publication) is importantly a function of the way it has taken me, or accompanied me, into so many texts by other writers that I choose to live with. It is perhaps the chief example of the texts I know that I adduce not alone as an object of interpretation but as a means of interpretation.

If friends, or enemies, had returned from reading Wittgenstein's last texts to report that something I say about the *Investigations* is shown, in their light, to be significantly awry, I hope I would have taken the time to study the further texts and come to an opinion. But in fact what I have been told is, rather on the contrary, that the further work tends to confirm the sort of view I have taken of the *Investigations*. (One of the earliest such messages to me concerned the passage from *On Certainty* quoted in Anthony Palmer's chapter: 'Knowledge is in the end based on acknowledgement' (OC 378). Of course that was gratifying to learn – my essay 'Knowing and Acknowledging' appeared the same year as the material in *On Certainty* was published. But is it my intellectual obligation, unbidden, to see how deep this apparent confirmation goes? Whom does my self-protection stand to harm – my reluctance unnecessarily to involve myself with work that I have evidence from my past would engage my interest but which I feel sure would be a less productive way for me to spend precious months or years than to continue with other, surely related, projects – other than myself?) McGinn does not, I believe, contest, directly anyway, what I say about *Philosophical Investigations*. She finds what I

say about it in *The Claim of Reason* incompatible with the writings Wittgenstein produced after the *Investigations*, in which he evidently speaks of a general uncertainty in the application of psychological concepts. This does seem to me to suggest a somewhat different focus from that of the *Investigations*. And the principal line of dissonance McGinn wishes to stress between what I say about Wittgenstein and the texts of Wittgenstein's she cites is that the uncertainty Wittgenstein concedes in the later work, or stresses, is that it does not add up to what I call scepticism. I have two responses to this.

I do not find that McGinn has responded to my efforts in contrasting scepticism with respect to (material) objects and that with respect to (other) subjects. This is a critical matter. As I noted in my response to Palmer, there is, in the Anglo-American dispensation of philosophy, compared with scepticism with respect to (external) objects, next to no canonical work on scepticism with respect to others. My work on the issue, at any rate, comes out of responses to Wittgenstein's *Investigations* and to Austin's responses to Wittgenstein's early pupil John Wisdom on the subject. When, among an indefinite number of other ways, I distinguish material object scepticism from other minds scepticism on the ground that the former cannot be lived with and the latter can be – is – lived with, I am in effect reconceiving, I might almost say, giving a further meaning to, 'other minds scepticism'. The meaning precisely has to do with a mode in which we live with others, practically, every day. It is a claim untouched by reassuring ourselves that '[a]cquiring our concepts and coming to participate in the wide range of interlocking activities within which they are employed is, for Wittgenstein, one and the same . . . Becoming at home in our language depends upon our learning when to be certain and when to doubt whether another's expression of, say, pain is genuine' (p. 246). This is not news for *The Claim of Reason*, which enjoys citing dozens, scores, of examples of such grammatical and criterial connections. More importantly, it is not news for scepticism, which precisely repudiates the finality of this learning, turns language against itself, language which the sceptic speaks as perfectly as anyone. That language can be so turned, that words stripped of their ordinary criteria do not lose all interest and sense for us, but can seem to be meant, indeed seem compulsively correct, is something Wittgenstein's understanding of our criteria discovers, so I claim. (To see that this compulsion is itself suspicious takes work. 'I have seen a person . . . strike himself on the breast and say: "But surely another person cannot have THIS pain!"' (PI 283)) McGinn appeals to our learning to speak as if she is supplying information, news. Wittgenstein says that what he supplies are reminders. And he has things to say about why such reminders are necessary – even about how they are possible, how we could need, and use, reminders of such things, and why they are difficult to absorb. If what he is supplying is supposed to be information, why isn't Wittgenstein impossibly boring (he is to many readers)? More interesting, why is he tireless in his repetition of examples? Since if we are merely ignorant of what they show,

they cannot be reminders, then are we randomly forgetful of them, or lazy about them (as Austin sometimes suggests), or take leave of our senses for no particular reason? *How can we deny them?* Who (and in what frame of mind), is Wittgenstein talking to, informing? ('What gives the impression that we want to deny anything?' (PI 305). What gives the impression that Wittgenstein wants to assert anything, that is, to advance theses?)

Is it possible, then, that what McGinn takes exception to is only, or mostly, that I call my 'uncertainties' scepticism? Why do it, anyway, since I never argue that we can never know the state of another? There are indeed a pair of reasons within my characterisation of scepticism for withholding that concept from the way I uncover the problem of the other, namely that it is unclear what a best case of acknowledgement of the other is, and that any other than a best case fails to generalise into a general sceptical conclusion (as happens in material object scepticism). Yet, even if the uncertainties I adduce were the same as Wittgenstein's throughout (I do invoke any number of Wittgenstein's examples), there would be motivation for my persisting in calling certain of my doubts about others sceptical, namely those that are not the result of ignorance but of denial or avoidance, of not, I might say, letting myself know. (This is of course a function of my not letting myself be known, and to myself.) This brings out, in return, a quality in material object scepticism as well. One can even say that in refusing the expressiveness of the body of the other, I affect my relation to my own body; coldness is not alone a mental blank. And the body in material object scepticism becomes a thing with senses, mostly eyes, disconnected from the motive power of the body.

The avoidance in scepticism, our subjection to the temptation to refuse interest in the details of the world and of others' lives in it, or convert the interest into information, I call the nihilism in scepticism. Reading McGinn, I feel I have over the years left this juncture of my view under-emphasised. But I am not sure how I could have stressed it more. In the small, I see it in the little deaths – the distractions, the ill will, the excuses, the insinuations, the ingratitude, the hedging – we deal ourselves and others in everyday existence (these are not incertitudes, but they characterise our general attribution of predicates to others). In the large, I see the nihilism in scepticism enacted in tragedy. I wonder what McGinn makes of my sense of scepticism's relation to tragedy, say of tragedy's suggested relation to what I call the asymmetry of material object and other minds scepticism. What appears in material object scepticism as an intellectual lack, namely the discovery that the best position I can be in is not enough to assure my certain knowledge of an object, in other minds scepticism becomes (more openly?) my rejection or avoidance of its object. It is up to me to determine what my stake in an object (i.e. a subject) is and what I am willing to risk responsibility for in acknowledging it. If I turn out to be wrong in the stake and unlucky in my risk, the world does not vanish, but my interest in it is dead. (Perhaps I might say that others mean no more to me than automata, or golems.) Is this scepticism? It is not obvious, or

settled. Given the relation I propose between object and subject scepticism, I wish to characterise the situation by saying (what should sound as paradoxical as object scepticism's ignorance of the world) that other minds scepticism is a scepticism I live with.

Since my sense of Wittgenstein is of a philosopher whose genius is committed to discovering and dispersing these causes of confinement (from the world, from each other), it cannot be right to characterise the Wittgenstein that emerges in my portrait of his thought in *The Claim of Reason* (or any consequent work of mine) as accepting 'something akin to sceptical doubt' (see p. 240). That his work seeks to understand how scepticism is possible, even where it is compelling, is what I argue. We should not feel safe in not understanding this. I'll come back to it in a moment.

But suppose that the uncertainties, or aporias, in *The Claim of Reason*, are not very or obviously close to those Wittgenstein invokes in his post-*Investigations* work (I say in the Foreword to *The Claim of Reason* (Cavell 1979: xix) that 'as my book moves into its latest strata, and continuously after about the first fourth of Part Four, I no longer regard my citations of the *Investigations* as interpretations of it'). Suppose, in other words, that what Wittgenstein uncovers in his general sense of uncertainty in psychological attribution (supposing this is his view) is not what emerges in Part Four of *The Claim of Reason*, in its encounters with automata, slaves, embryos, golems, enchanted frogs, statues, dolls, bodies as guises, the outsider, horror, best cases of knowledge and of acknowledgement, confinement and exposure in knowing. Then we differ on the matter.

The perception of my encounter with Wittgenstein as resulting in my attributing to him (or to myself, for that matter) a view 'akin to scepticism' is distressing enough to me that I would like to use the occasion of a passing remark in the chapter Edward Minar has contributed to the present volume to formulate certain further summary remarks on the subject. He quotes in association with the remark (which I shall cite in a moment) a sentence from an earlier paper of McGinn's that I have not seen, in which she links what I call the truth in scepticism with the state of uncertainty that surrounds our judgements about others, a quotation that confirms my sense that McGinn's characterising what I advance as a view 'akin to sceptical doubt' takes it that I think scepticism is more or less true. I, or someone, *might* have meant that in inventing the phrase 'the truth of scepticism'. But in fact I mean something by it that is not so much a negation of scepticism (if, say, Moore's declarations of knowledge are taken to be instances of negations of scepticism), but is something that scepticism could not formulate, namely something about our fundamental relation to the world as not one of knowing. What scepticism thinks it has discovered to be true, is that we do not (except in a way; let's say, more or less) know things as they are. Why risk being misunderstood about this? In a sense the inevitability of risk here is what Parts One and Two of *The Claim of Reason* are meant to clarify. Minar's remark may help me locate the

issue briefly. (Minar had sent me his chapter in the winter of 2002/03, and what I report now is drawn from the response I gave then to it.)

The remark Minar cites in passing is this (p. 219): 'In speaking of a truth of scepticism, Cavell is often taken, naturally enough, to mean that scepticism is more or less true.' It is that casual 'naturally enough' that calls me to account. Because of the incessant effort of *The Claim of Reason* to show simultaneously the recurrent senses of the naturalness and the unnaturalness of scepticism, hence of the difficulty of seeing it in particular cases when it is in front of your eyes (as in such examples as 'No one can have THIS pain!' and 'An "inner process" stands in need of outward criteria' (PI 580)), I have not been unprepared to find a certain impatience with what appears to be my refusal to come clean about whether I accept or reject scepticism. I think I have never simply put the ideas of 'the truth of scepticism' and 'the thesis of scepticism' together and tried in that way to help prevent their confusion – while maintaining the fact that it is essential to my account that it is indeed 'natural enough' to confuse them.

My charge against the (modern, opposed to the ancient) sceptic can be put as the claim that it is the sceptic who confuses them. It is the thesis of the sceptic that we do not know, are not certain . . . ever. I have wanted to make it a question how and why the sceptic takes his discovery to be a thesis. It is the truth of scepticism that it is not a thesis, that it is the expression of something about our relation to language and to the world as a whole that I find essential to our knowledge of ourselves in the world with others. It is, from my point of view, pointless to reject scepticism, since every sceptic in some sense rejects scepticism, that is, recognises that it is paradoxical, that, as he may say, for practical purposes it is out of order. So what are we suffering from?

It has been cited to me as one of countless instances in which Wittgenstein supposedly repudiates scepticism's use of words as nonsensical, the following, from *On Certainty*: 'If the shopkeeper wanted to investigate each of his apples without any reason, for the sake of being certain about everything, why doesn't he have to investigate the investigation?' (OC 459) But what this seems rather to show is that the effort to repudiate scepticism in such a way suffers whatever ill scepticism suffers. 'Investigate the investigation', in this context, either means nothing (yet) or else it serves to increase the imagined hysteria of the shopkeeper, within the shopkeeper and within his observer/critic. Why else would Wittgenstein persist in articulating effectively endless further such repudiations?

On the opening page of *On Certainty* we find the following two entries:

Now, can one enumerate what one knows (like Moore)? [Wittgenstein cites 'I know that here is one hand' and 'I know that I am a human being.']. Straight off like that, I believe not. – For otherwise the expression 'I know' gets misused . . . .

My life shows that I know or am certain that there is a chair over there, or a door, and so on. – I tell a friend e.g., ‘Take that chair over there’, ‘shut the door’, etc., etc.

(OC 6–7)

Put these entries together and what they announce is that I cannot say I know precisely what my life shows I know. But that is a way of expressing what I mean by the truth of scepticism, what prompts me to say that my relation to my life in the world as a whole is not one of knowing. Then what has to be investigated next is, for example, what ‘my relation to my life’ means, and what is captured by the phrase ‘the world as a whole’.

By the way, I can recall two sources for my use of the phrase ‘the truth of’ as in ‘the truth of scepticism’. One is a memory of Hegel’s use of ‘the truth of x’ where x is a concept he has just sublated, denied at one level but preserved when adopted at another. The other source is a story told by John Wisdom. On leaving a philosophical discussion together, Wisdom asked Wittgenstein why the speaker seemed determined to refuse the clear point Wisdom had advanced against his view. Wittgenstein replied: ‘Perhaps it was because you were denying something in the truth of his view’, which I do not take to imply that the view is, even in part, true. Perhaps we have an example at hand. If someone insists on saying, ‘I know there is a chair, or door, etc., etc. . . . there’, we might insist back that that is (while pretty clearly not false) not true, and that it is not more or less true; it conveys no information that is either true or false; language is idling, or racing. We might allow ourselves to remain at loggerheads, or else, perhaps, try saying that there is a truth in this claim to know, namely that my life with such objects, props and emblems of the everyday, shows the certainty of my knowledge of them, of, as it were, their lives apart from me, e.g. that they do not need my attention much of the time, that I am right to take them for granted, that they are at my disposal. But what this seems to show is that my (misplaced) assertion of, insistence upon, my knowledge *stands in the way* of recognising the truth it reveals. So does your insistence that I do not know.

I noted at the outset that there is nothing I feel pressed to take issue with in the chapters of Edward Minar and of Andrea Kern. But since I recognise in each of them the continuing of conversations that I trust will perpetuate, I might just indicate, in concluding, one point in each at which I feel a continuation would be useful.

Minar is extraordinarily careful in his characterisations of scepticism, yet an expression he uses at least three times might, I fear, be taken up without noticing the care he has exercised in qualifying it each time. I mean the expression, in characterising the beginning of the sceptic’s problematic, of its ‘getting off the ground’. On p. 232 he speaks of Wittgenstein’s challenging ‘the ease with which the sceptical interpretation of the relation between behaviour and mind gets off the ground’; on p. 234 he speaks of ‘the failure

of other minds scepticism to get in the same sense off the ground'; on p. 238, note 5, he speaks of 'the failure of the sceptic's problem, as he understands it, to get off the ground'. The importance of the failure of other minds scepticism, of its failure to produce a scepticism I cannot live with, yields a field of relation between us, of our lives together, in need of philosophical description. At the same time, Minar's qualifications – speaking of challenging the ease, of the different sense, of the particular understanding – attending this scepticism's getting off the ground means that, with sufficient motivation, and in a sense, and given a certain understanding, scepticism does get off the ground, each direction of scepticism in its own way, and each ends in its own place. The importance, in my experience, of bearing Minar's qualifications in mind is that the image of 'stopping something before it gets off the ground' (without qualification) is J.L. Austin's favourite way of justifying his digging in his linguistic heels at the first whiff of metaphysical desire, before all before the temptation to scepticism, which drives Austin sometimes to a dogmatism in the appeal to ordinary language which, to my mind, limits what it reveals about our lives and about the language that gives human life its form.

Andrea Kern's idea of distinguishing among conceptions of philosophical therapy is very welcome to me. I hope it can help deflect an avoidance of the idea of philosophical therapy that I have heard expressed, by gifted philosophers, in characterising the task of therapy as an effort to be cured of philosophy as such. The task, to my mind, on the contrary, is an effort to make explicit a contemporary connection with a therapeutic aspiration of philosophy born with philosophy itself, taking different forms in different historical periods, call it the aspiration to free the soul from self-imposed bondage. The point of continuation I have in mind from Kern's text comes from the proposal she summarises or epitomises by saying 'Knowing is responding' (p. 210), a thought to which I am sympathetic. But something in her elaboration of the thought seems to me to warrant caution. She says, for example: 'We learn not simply to perceive that someone is expressing pain. More fundamentally, we learn to *respond* to someone expressing pain. . . . We learn to feel pity for her, to console her, to give her medication, to call for a doctor, etc. We learn to use the concept of pain in learning how to respond to someone expressing pain'; and 'We have mastered the use of a certain concept – we are familiar with its use – as we participate in a "custom" or, as I would prefer to say, a *practice*' (p. 209).

Do we (in what sense do we) learn to feel pity? Wittgenstein asks, at *Investigations* p. 218: 'What is the primitive reaction with which the language-game begins?' The idea of 'primitive' here might be something like this, that only with the acquisition of language do we come to distinguish and individuate, within a recurrent, generalised unpleasure, feelings of hunger, loneliness, abandonment, depression, anger, fear, pity . . . If we say we learn to feel pity, would we understand the difference between this learning and

learning, for example, to give medication? (Would we understand how it is that, as we might feel, there are so many ways to express, or modify the expression of, pity; and so few ways to give medication?) Do we learn, in comforting someone, not to look at the place of their pain (as a doctor might) but to look the sufferer in the face (as the doctor also, in good time, might)?<sup>4</sup> We can say that we learn to replace crying by language,<sup>5</sup> but we also sometimes say we learn to walk. Is walking a custom or practice? Wittgenstein calls it part of our natural history (PI 25). Kern's idea of responsiveness opens the region in Wittgenstein that, to my way of thinking, challenges us to rethink the complexity of the relation of the natural and the conventional ('the'? 'relation?') – which means to think what Wittgenstein means by speaking of speech as the human life form (PI 174). I am glad that she is able to say such good things as, 'In normal cases, our behaviour responsive to pain does not rest upon evidence which answers the question: is the other actually in pain? Rather, it is itself the answer to this question' (p. 211). But I do not want this to deny the complexities. For might we not also sometimes wish to say, for example, the response rebukes the question? Which does not mean that the question will not recur.

### Notes

- 1 Editor's note: Conant's chapter also addresses Cavell's work on this topic but arrived too late in the compilation of the volume for it to be included in the set of chapters to which Cavell has responded.
- 2 Quoted in Cavell 1979: 68, the emphasis is Albritton's.
- 3 Quoted in Cavell 1979: 431.
- 4 See PI 286.
- 5 See PI 244.

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BB *The Blue and Brown Books*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1969.

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RPP 1 *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology*, Volume I, eds. G.E.M. Anscombe and G.H. von Wright, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe, Oxford: Blackwell, 1980.

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References are to page numbers with the following exceptions: (i) LW 1, OC, RPP 1, RPP 2, Z and Part I of PI, where numbers refer to section numbers; (ii) PT and TLP, where numbers refer to proposition numbers; and (iii) RC and RFM, where the roman numeral refers to part and the arabic to section.

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# INDEX

acknowledgement of others 231–4  
Agrippan scepticism 76–8  
antecedent justification 57–8  
appearance, reality and 99  
arbitrariness, Wittgenstein on 168  
Aristotle 20, 267, 268, 269, 271, 272, 273, 278, 281–2  
arithmetic: certainty of basic 43–4; series ‘n + 2’ 168  
Augustine of Hippo 167  
Austin, J.L. 228, 282, 285, 286, 290  
automata 229–30  
*The Avoidance of Love* (Cavell, S.) 260  
Ayer, A.J. 116

Bambrough, Renford 165, 166–7, 168  
behaviour: behavioural criteria 208–10, 256; criteria for fear 205; criteria for pain 205–6, 208–10, 232, 247–8, 258; deception, language-game and 245–7; expressive 202, 209–10; knowledge formed from 227–31; mind and 223–7; primitive behaviour and language 247; responsive 209–10  
belief: foundationalist conception of basic 77; indexically formulated 57; ‘perceptually minimal’ 59–63  
Berkeley, George 162–3, 170  
Bilgrami, Akeel 6–7  
*The Blue and Brown Books* (Wittgenstein, L.) 1, 165, 166, 168  
boggling of the mind (Kantian) 112, 122  
Broad, C.D. 116

Carnap, Rudolf 87  
Cartesian scepticism 9–10, 18–20, 56–61, 61–8, 76–8, 97–110, 115–17, 118–30, 139; Cartesian gap 107, 110, 223–7; discussion on use of the term 97–8, 103–5; distinct from Kantian 97–102; idealisation of 105–7; paradox of 97, 100, 101, 110, 122; Cavell, Stanley 1, 3–4, 14–20, 106, 122–30, 200–1, 206–8, 215, 218–21, 227, 228, 230, 233–7, 240–4, 253, 258, 260, 261, 262, 265–6, 272, 273–5  
certainty: of basic arithmetic 43–4; criteria and 206, 282–7; differential 91; doubts and propositions exempt from 38–9, 71; methods of doubt and enquiry concerning 39–41; norms of enquiry 31–7; presuppositional 31, 32–3, 38–9, 48–53; unearned, presupposition of 38–9  
*On Certainty* (Wittgenstein, L.) 1, 4–7, 22, 31–43, 47–8, 53, 68, 71, 76, 78–96, 137, 156, 176, 275–6, 284, 288–9  
Chisholm, R.M. 116  
*The Claim of Reason* (Cavell, S.) 122, 126–7, 129, 130, 218, 261, 280–5  
Clarke, Thompson 2–3, 6  
'closure principle' 3  
cognitive locality 52  
cognitive risk 49–50, 53  
completeness, ideal of 180–2  
Conant, James 9–10  
*The Concept of Mind* (Ryle, G.) 273  
*Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome* (Cavell, S.) 123  
con-formity: acquired 140–1; intelligibility and 139–41, 141–3, 152–3; internal relatedness of names and objects and 150–1; knowledge and 139–41; signs, symbols and intelligibility as 141–3

consciousness: defining characteristic of identity 262–3; object-directed 170–1; sense-data and 92; states of 27

consistency, ideal of 180

context-specific propositions 49

contextualism in enquiry 67

Cratylus 268, 276

criteria: behavioural 208–10, 256; and candidates for knowledge 129; certainty and 206, 282–7; epistemic role of 207–11; for fear 205; feigned criteria and judgement 202, 245–6; indeterminateness in 256–8; knowledge claims and 126; for pain 202, 205–6, 208–10, 232, 247–8, 258; transcendental role of 207; of truth, language-game and 177; Wittgenstein's notion of 126–30, 201–3, 240–4

*Criteria, Defeasibility and Knowledge* (McDowell, J.) 126

*Critique of Pure Reason* (Kant, I.) 170

cultural relativism 176

Davidson, Arnold 218

Davidson, Donald 122

deception: language-game, behaviour and 245–7; positive empirical evidence of 64; *prima facie* justification and 66

*A Defense of Common Sense* (Moore, G.E.) 4, 22, 32, 76, 275

Dennett, D.C. 179, 182, 186

Descartes, René 18, 52, 57, 62–3, 65, 68, 77, 98, 103, 108, 110, 260, 261, 262–6, 271, 272–4, 276, 278–81

*Dewey Lectures* (Putnam, H.) 117–21

Diamond, Cora 200

Dilman, Ilham 11–12

disjunctive conception of experience 205, 206–7

*Disowning Knowledge* (Cavell, S.) 260

dissolving therapy 203–4, 205–6, 208–9

dogmatism 57–8

doubt: affirmation of 200–1, 206–11; Cartesian and Kantian sceptical position on 104; Cartesian presentation of 62; coherence in 78–9; discovery, doubt yielding to 107, 108–9, 122, 124; doubt behind ordinary doubt, idea of 88, 94; general uncertainty of language-game 255–8, 282–7; generalisation in formulating principle of 64–5, 68; groundless 79; idealistic doubt 84, 85; illusion of sceptical 79, 84–6; intelligibility of 80–1; language-game and resolution of 84, 85; logic of 79; methods of enquiry concerning 39–41; mind-boggling 111, 112, 122; ordinary doubt, concept of 79, 81, 252, 253; philosophical doubt 244–5, 249–52, 253; 'practical' 85, 110; propositions exempt from 38–9, 71; reinterpretation of sceptical 200–16; theoretical 110; therapy as dissolution of sceptical 203–6

dreaming 57, 66, 170; experience and 98–9

Duhem–Quine thesis 34

eliminativism: avoidance of 186–7; generation of 187, 195–8; rationality, prediction and 179–82, 184–7; variety of forms of 178

empiricism: 169–73

*Empiricism, Two Dogmas of* (Quine, W.V.O.) 23, 36

enquiry: assumption and 71; empirical considerations and 66–7; epistemology and 65, 74; philosophical doubt and diagnostic enquiry 84; philosophy and 64–8; a priori considerations and 66–7; truth, a goal of 73

entitlement: generalisation of 53; justifiable presupposition 50–3

epistemology: enquiry and 65, 74; epistemic failure 211; epistemic priority of experience 94; epistemic status 93; epistemological consequence 202; epistemological realism 94–6; 'hinge' in pragmatist epistemology 71–2; traditional 64–5, 68

error: immunity from 90–1; reflection on 84, 85, 89–90

*Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (Locke, J.) 261, 262–6

evidence: appropriate grounds of 81–3; assumption and 71; defeasibility of criteria 203–4; and experience 37; perceptual justification and 65–8; ranking of 44; relevance of 70; rules of 42–4; significance of 44–5

existence 91–2

experience: claims, general and

## INDEX

particular, on objects of 112–13; disconfirmation through 40–1; disjunctive conception of 205, 206–7; dreaming and 98–9; empiricism and 169–70; epistemic priority of 94; evidence and 37; intelligibility of 99; Kant on 170–1; knowledge and 100, 104; Lockean view of 26–7; perceptual belief and 62–4, 68, 70; as *prima facie* justification 66; ‘recalcitrant’ 35

expressive behaviour 202, 209–10

external relations 149, 152

*Facts and Certainty* (Wright, C.) 5, 7, 68

fallacy: of gambler 184, 191, 193; of ‘quantifier shift’ 190

fallibilism 56, 61, 73

fear, criteria for 205

Fichte, J.G. 280

Fogelin, R.J. 1

foundationalism, traditional 77

*The Fragility of Goodness* (Naussbaum, M.) 267

‘framework judgements’ 77, 86

Framework Reading 7–8, 77–8, 82, 83, 86

Frege, Gottlob 100

gambler’s fallacy 184, 191, 193

God 174–5

Gould, Timothy 218

grammar 167–8, 203, 258–9; grammatical uncertainty 256–8

*The Grammar of Assent* (Newman, J.H.) 265

groundlessness: in assumption 42–3; of doubts 79

Hacker, P.M.S. 137–8, 144

hallucination 57, 170

Heal, Jane 12–13

Hegel, G.W.F. 280

Hertz, H.R. 170–1

‘hinge’ propositions 31–8, 38–41, 71–2;

Hume, David 166, 167, 169, 271

idealism: behaviour and 11; Berkeleyan 162–3; concept acquisition and 141; idealistic doubt 84, 85; illusion of meaning and 88–9; linguistic 162–77; realism and nominalism as forms of 164–9; Wittgenstein’s refutation of 76–96

ideas: sensory ideas, Cartesian veil of 100, 108–9; words and, Locke’s concept of 262–6

immediate justification 58–61, 62, 66

inference: feasibility of 183, 185–6, 187–9; inferential architecture 30–1; perception and 26–7; rationality and 187, 188–90, 191–2, 195

information-dependence 23–6, 27, 30–1

intelligibility: of experience 99; knowledge, con-formity and 139–41, 152–3; signs, symbols and 141–3, 152–3

intentionality: ‘intrinsic intentionality’ of Subject 146; rationality and 179–80, 183–4, 185, 195

‘interface conception’ 117–22;

internal relations: discovery of 149; logical spaces and 151; names and objects 149–51; sign/symbol hybrid and 151–4; solipsism and 151–4; Wittgenstein’s views on 148–9; between world and language 143, 144–5, 173–5, 176

internalism: philosophy of mind and truth 45–7

James, William 117, 120, 121

Johnson, Dr Samuel 18, 264, 265

judgement: epistemic context in 82, 83; expressive behaviour and 202; feigned criteria and 202, 245–6; ‘framework’ judgements 77, 86; objective purport of 100

justification: antecedent 57–8; criteria for claims of knowledge and 126; empiricism and ultimate 172; immediate 58–61, 62, 66; judgement and 77; mediate 58, 59; perceptual justification and evidence 65–8; *prima facie* 58, 60, 61; regress of 76–7

Kant, Immanuel 2, 98–9, 103, 105, 111, 113, 170–1, 173, 266, 280

Kantian scepticism 9–10, 12, 97–107, 111–17, 118–30; discussion on use of the term 97–8, 103–5; distinct from Cartesian 97–102; idealisation of 105–7; Kantian gap 111, 114–15, 223–7; paradox of 97, 101, 102,

114–15, 123; Wittgenstein's view compared 123–4, 124–6, 127–8

Kern, Andrea 4, 13–15, 278, 289–91

Kierkegaard, Søren 218

*Knowing and Acknowledging* (Cavell, S.) 273–4

knowledge: assumption and 76–7; background 59; behaviour as foundation for 227–31; Cartesian best case for 100, 107–8, 124, 227–31; cognitive achievement as 31–2, 39, 48–9; con-formity and intelligibility 139–41; conditions of knowledge and 99, 104; doubt in philosophy and 138; experience and 100, 104; experiential 90; factive 92–3, 94; intelligibility of claims of 81–2; justification and criteria for claims of 126; Kantian view on 100–1; knowing as responding 210–11; logic of 'know' 79–83; in mathematics 89; as 'mental state' 93–5; perceptual belief and 62–3; perceptual knowledge 57; sense-data and 90

*Our Knowledge of the External World* (Russell, B.) 137

Kripke, Saul 1, 4, 122–4, 162

language: empiricism and 170, 172–3, 175–6; generality inherent in meanings of words 164–7; hooking on the world 119, 120, 121, 143–4; human world and 173–5; internal relationship between world and 143, 144–5, 173–5, 176; learning of 144–5; limits of 146; logic and 142–3, 163–4; primitive behaviour and 247; Subject and 143–4, 146

language-game: behaviour and 164, 171; context and meaning 80–1; criteria of truth and 177; deception, behaviour and 245–7; general uncertainty of 255–8, 282–7; logic of 36–7, 44–5, 92; malleability of 95–6; philosophical doubt and 84, 85, 244–5, 249–52, 253; of physical description 258; psychological 258; rules of 44–5, 95; sceptical doubt in 240–59, 282–7

*Last Writings on the Philosophy of Psychology* (Wittgenstein, L.) 1, 210, 245, 246, 249–50, 253, 255–9

*Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics*,

*Psychology and Religious Belief* (Wittgenstein, L.) 176–7

*Lectures on Logical Atomism* (Russell, B.) 268

Lewis, C.I. 116, 121, 122

linguistic idealism 162–77

linguistic realism: empiricism and 170; idealism and 164–9

Locke, John 18, 169, 170, 261, 262–6, 272, 276, 278–9

Lockean realism 163

Lockean view of experience 26–7

logic: 'antecedent to truth' 44; discipline of formal 169; of 'doubt' and 'know' 79–83; language and 142–3, 163–4; of language-game 36–7, 44–5; logical investigation 90; logical proposition 90; mathematics and 34–6; predetermined constraints on 36

McDowell, John 14, 59, 117–22, 124–30, 200, 204

McGinn, Marie 16–18, 82, 83, 200, 219, 278, 282–7

Malcolm, Norman 4, 240–1, 243, 273–4, 282–3

mathematics: 'antecedent to truth' 44; discipline of 169; elementary propositions in 77; knowledge in 89; logic and 34–6; predetermined constraints on 36; Wittgenstein on 170

meaning: change in the meaning of words 95–6; context and 80; generality inherent in meanings of words 164–7; illusion of meaning and idealism 88–9; internalist vision of 45; interpretation and 101–2; meaningfulness of propositions 153; physiognomy of 102; possibility of 118–19; Wittgenstein's idea of 84–5

meaning scepticism 105

mediate justification 58, 59

*Meditations on the First Philosophy* (Descartes, R.) 65, 260, 261, 262, 265, 266, 271, 273, 274, 276

*Metaphysics* (Aristotle) 268

Minar, Edward 4, 16–17, 278, 287–8, 289–90

*Mind and World* (McDowell, J.) 118, 119, 121, 127–8

Montaigne, Michel de 260, 261, 266–72, 278, 279, 281–2

## INDEX

Moore, G.E. 4, 6, 22, 23, 24, 26, 27, 32–3, 53, 56–61, 61–8, 76, 78–82, 85, 90–4, 116, 172, 222, 275

natural realism 117–18, 121

natural science 187, 197

Newcomb's paradox 181

Newman, John Henry, Cardinal 265

nominalism: linguistic realism and idealism 164–9; philosophical thesis of 166

norms-in-context 36–7, 38–9, 41, 43–4

*Notebooks 1914–16* (Wittgenstein, L.) 138, 145, 147

Nussbaum, Martha 267, 269

*Outlines of Pyrrhonism* (Sextus Empiricus) 266, 269–70

Owen, G.E.L. 267

pain: Cartesian problem of recognition in others of 101, 126–7, 201–2; criteria for 202, 205–6, 208–10, 232, 247–8, 258; fly and feelings of 250–1; indifference to others' 254–5

Palmer, Anthony 1, 18–20, 278–80, 284–5

particularity: claims, general and particular, on knowledge 112–13; in other minds scepticism 222

Pears, David 139, 153–4

perception: hooking on to the world 120–1; inferential 26–7; perceptual belief and experience 62–4, 68, 70; perceptual justification and evidence 65–8; perceptual knowledge 57; 'perceptually minimal' belief 59–63; philosophy of 100–1, 110; positive presumption in perceptual beliefs 62–3; presupposition and 48

*Philosophical Investigations* (Wittgenstein, L.) 1, 2, 11, 16, 19, 30, 54, 118, 123–4, 128, 129, 146, 156, 163–4, 165, 168, 203, 205, 209, 218, 224, 227, 231, 232, 236, 256, 268, 272–4, 276, 280, 282–8

*Philosophy and Mystification* (Robinson, G.) 268–9

physical objects: existence of 78–9, 85–7, 88–92; identification of 86

physics: completeness of 181; discipline of 169

Plato 267, 268, 269

Platonic Forms 269, 272, 273, 281

positive presumption 61–4, 67–8

pragmatism: enquiry and 65–8; norms, pragmatic view of 95–6; relativism and 73; scepticism and 56–74; traditional epistemology and 64–5, 68

prediction 179–82, 190–4

presumption, positive 61–4

presupposition: certainties and 31, 32–3, 38–9, 48–53; entitlement, justification of 50–3; unearned 38–9

Price, H.H. 116, 164

prima facie justification 58, 60, 61, 66, 68

*The Privacy of Experience* (Malcolm, N.) 273–4

Private Language Argument 3, 156, 273–5, 281

probability, rationality and 184

proof: empirical confirmation 23–6; Moore's concept of 22–6, 56–7, 68–9, 76, 78–82, 85, 90–4; transmission failure 23–6, 27; validity of argument 23

*Proof of an External World* (Moore, G.E.) 4, 22, 76

Pryor, James 6–7, 56–61, 61–8

psychology: judgement and use of psychological concepts 187; psychological concepts 178–98, 211, 248–9; psychological thinking 187

Putnam, Hilary 5, 45, 117–22

Pyrrhonian scepticism 1, 19–20, 261, 266–72, 279, 281–2

'quantifier shift' fallacy 190

Quine, W.V.O. 23, 36, 169–70

rationality: capacity and 187–90; demands of 181–4; effective inferential engagement and 187–9; explanatory norms and 186, 189–90, 194–5; feasibility of inference and 183, 185–6, 187–9; flexibility in satisfying demands of 183–4; inferential outlook and 187, 188–90, 191–2, 195; intentionality and 179–80, 183–4, 185, 195; perfection in 182–3, 194–5; prediction, eliminativism and 179–82; probability and 184; 'quantifier shift' fallacy and 190; 'stances,' predictive

## INDEX

179–80, 182, 184; two-element concept of 184, 187–90, 191–4, 195–8

realism: empiricism and linguistic 170; illusion of meaning and 88–9; linguistic, idealism and 164–9; ‘natural’ of the common man 117–18, 121; philosophical 162–3, 166

reality: God’s 173, 174–5; language and 163; relative term 169, 175–6; society (of the feeble-minded) and 168–9, 175; Wittgenstein’s view on 168

relativism: cultural 176; pragmatism and 73

*Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics* (Wittgenstein, L.) 1, 34, 35, 36, 44

*Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology* (Wittgenstein, L.) 1, 240, 247–52, 255

responsive behaviour 209–10

risk: cognitive 49–50, 53; in warrant acquisition 49–50, 53

‘river-bed’ metaphor for 33–4, 36;

Robinson, Guy 268–9

Russell, Bertrand 116, 137–8, 139, 162, 172, 268

Ryle, Gilbert 273

St Luke 281

Sellars, Wilfred 116, 121, 122

sense-data 90–2, 138, 170, 173

senses: empiricism and sense-data 170, 173; inference from sight 188–9; knowledge and sense-data 90–2; sensory consciousness, Kantian problem of 100–1; sensory ideas, Cartesian veil of 100, 108–9; testimony of the 100–1

Sextus Empiricus 19, 261, 266, 268, 269–70, 271

Shakespeare, William 18–20, 260, 261, 262, 264–5, 272, 273–4, 276, 278–81

solipsism: internal relations and the sign/symbol hybrid 151–4; solipsistic metaphysics 147–8, 153; Wittgenstein’s ‘key’ to 146

Strawson, Peter 116

Subject: composition of 146–7; denial of existence of 147–8; ‘intrinsic intentionality’ of 146; language and 143–4, 146; solipsistic ‘internal relation’ of world and 151–4

symbols: learning 144–7; signs and intelligibility 141–3; solipsism, internal relations and the hybrid of signs and 151–4

Tate, Nathan 266

*Thinking and Experience* (Price, H.H.) 164

*Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (Wittgenstein, L.) 10–11, 36, 44, 137–56, 163, 284

tragedy 236–7, 260–76, 278–82

transcendental argument 2–3, 70

*A Treatise of Human Nature* (Hume, D.) 271

truth: internalist vision of 45–7; objective purport and 99–100; relativity and 73, 177; scepticism and 219–20, 231–4; truth-conditions 44–5; truth-values 44; understanding and 89

uncertainty *see* doubt

understanding: of doubt 207–11; truth and 89; Wittgenstein’s idea of 84–5

validity, objective 100

Williams, Bernard 162

Williams, Michael 7–8

Winch, Peter 173

Wisdom, John 285

*Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language* (Kripke, S.A.) 122

*Wittgenstein and the Vienna Circle* 138

Wright, Crispin 5, 6, 68–72

*Zettel* (Wittgenstein, L.) 166, 167–8, 175